THE ENCOUNTER

ANNE·DOUGLAS·SEDGWICK

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BY

ANNE DOUGLAS SEDGWICK

(Mrs. Basil de Sélincourt)

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NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1915

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Published, October, 1914

Those of my readers who are familiar with the life of a famous modern philosopher will find a resemblance to his tragi-comic love affair in the story of Ludwig Wehlitz and Persis Fennamy. With the exception of its central figure, who embodies an impression of his piteous and splendid prototype, the characters in my novel are entirely imaginary.

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CHAPTER I

IT was very still in the Pension Müller. The oil-lamp had been thriftily extinguished in the entrance hall an hour before, and it was two hours since the band had ceased playing in the *Kur-Garten*. The last murmurs of the little German watering-place, held in the shallow cup of its surrounding hills, came, irresolutely, lethargically, through the open window where Persis Fennamy sat, like the broken words of a child that falls asleep. The window was at the back of the pension and overlooked, from its top story, the gnarled old apple-trees in the garden below, where tin tables stood among untidy grass. An iron grille at the bottom of the garden, rusty, but of a somewhat imposing height and pattern, gave upon the river-path; then came the river with its bordering of woods, and the quiet hills, rising, some miles away, to a fairly dignified mountainous silhouette. On the right the river-path led to the *Eichen Promenade* where, among a little plantation of oak-trees, a cheerfully caparisoned café attracted many customers on the warm autumn evenings.

All was dully sleeping now and offered little of beauty to the young girl sitting at her window, her elbows on the table drawn beside it, her head in her hands. The very river looked like a grey pavement, it hardly seemed to flow, and the hills with their neat patchwork of wood and vineyard, sharply outlined on the sky, looked like pasteboard scenery. Only the moon, high in the heavens, had grace, and the illumined air and the two lombardy poplars which grew in an adjacent garden and trembled incessantly as the soft night-wind passed over them. Upon these trees Persis Fennamy had fixed her eyes, and in the prosaic stillness they were like her thoughts, lonely, dark, serene, and aimlessly melancholy.

The two candles, placed at either end of the table, and hardly flickering in the nocturnal air, revealed a childish profile, with rounded forehead, small, flattened nose, small, short chin; in full face, the long brows and dilated nostrils and wide curled lips, that seemed at once to pout with a sort of weariness and to smile with a sort of disdain, tinged the more trivial aspects with Egyptian analogies of haughty, pensive force. The eyes were large, radiant and cold.

She had sat here for a long time—ever since she and her mother had come up from their small salon on the ground floor where they had spent the evening on either side of the lamp, she over a volume of Carducci, her mother quietly rustling among the pages of the English and American newspapers that the post had brought. The sonorous Italian rhythms had been

beating in her mind as she came upstairs; and all the time that she had sat here they had seemed to people her thoughts with dissolving arabesques, with arabesques that were feelings rather than forms, feelings imperious, urgent, stoically yet languorously sad. At first, the rhythmic urgency beating in her, she had thought that she would write. She had never kept a diary; she had never been interested in recorded facts, even when they concerned herself, and, even in early girlhood, had known little of any but a disinterested, unemotional introspection. But she wrote poetry sometimes, fragmentary, inconclusive verses; her moods seeming to drive them in, as waves drive in their crumbling, fretted curves upon the sands. Sheaves of such records, written on haphazard sheets, filled the battered green leather box that stood on the chest of drawers; treasured, with its velvet lining and secure lock, since her thirteenth birthday, when her mother had given it to her to hold the already accumulating store. But though to-night she had drawn the paper towards her, and though the pen lay ready beside it, she had written nothing. The cloudy arabesques, towering, falling, wreathing—those feelings of undefined power—had shaped themselves, as the time went by, into faces only, into a retrospect peopled by a procession of faces that made her more lonely than before; for, though so many, they were none of them near. There was the nameless little face, red-hooded, pale and freckled on a snowy background, of some little girl with whom in very early

childhood she had played in America; she often saw her clearly, and she sometimes wondered what had become of her; with this came a hovering of the eyes and smile of an Irish nurse and the benignant form of a grandmother, in black silk, with lace cap and diamond brooch, who had taken her to a mysteriously glimmering cupboard and given her slices of "layer cake"; and then a dim vision—dim because so slight and swift, yet it seemed to flash always like a falling star—of her father's face, with strange, pale, shining eyes and tossed back hair. He had died when she was four. After this came the crowded faces of all their wanderings, her mother's and hers—English, French, German, Italian, Russian; faces of *bonnes* and language mistresses, of table d'hôte acquaintances, friends picked up at an Italian lake or French *plage* or pension salon—faces of the English family with whom they had gone to stay in Somersetshire; once only; they had been bored there; faces of the young Russian nihilists they had come to know in Rome; the face of the blind, learned German baroness, to whose remote Prussian country-house they still paid a visit every year, and the face of little Ninka, with whose family they had spent a summer in Russia two years ago; (little Ninka, now dead, who had been so fond of her, and who, foolish and gentle, had used to lean her head against her shoulder as she stood beside her and to say: "I love you. You have the eyes of a sea-maiden"); and Dexter Mainwaring of Philadelphia, with whom she had ridden in the Bois,

in Paris, and whose urbane and elegant mother had been so manifestly relieved when he had gone back to Harvard unengaged; she had never given him a chance to propose to her, though she had clearly seen his state; he had made her think always of a beautiful cake of soap, soap of the very best quality wrapped in fine tissue-paper—; and through it all, of course, looking at the procession with her, indeed, rather than in it, went the little mild, coiffed head of her mother, and the dark eyes and large yellow teeth of Eleanora Zardo; while, like a lamp behind a thin and tattered tapestry, she saw approach nearer and nearer the face that held her thoughts more than any other, the beautiful face that emerged at last of Prince Marco. Persis did not know that she had fallen in love with the Prince. She did not analyse her feeling for him. He had arrested and enchanted her. She had felt herself drawn towards him as a child is drawn, irresistibly, by some bright object. All that could be counted as passion in her consciousness was the icy, watchful pride in which her emotion sheathed itself when aware that nothing in his responded to it. She was indifferently aware of worldly standards, but it hardly crossed her thoughts that, even had he responded, a wandering American girl with the tiniest of dots could hardly have hoped for an alliance with the splendid and impoverished creature. It was the fact of his indifference that had held her in a vice of suffering. He had married, the winter before, a pretty, commonplace little millionairess, Dexter Mainwaring's

cousin. He was said to be in love with her and Persis had noted that she had golden hair and blue eyes as indifferently as she noted, when her mother pointed it out to her, that her ears were placed too low and made her look like a newt. Whether the Prince's bride were pretty or not pretty, and whether he had married her for love or for money solely, were equally idle matters to Persis since he had not loved herself. She knew no malice and no jealousy. Now, in thinking of him, of the glance and smile that had always made her think of a pomegranate-flower, she closed her eyes and leaned her head down on her arms and let her grief pass over her as the trembling passed over the poplars. And so she sat for a long time, drowned in a tearless, passionless melancholy.

She roused herself at last. One o'clock had struck from the clock-tower in the town. She sat upright and pushed back the hair that had fallen about her face. Now she felt dispossessed, chill, indifferent. She had turned her eyes on the poplars again and they looked to her like vast submarine plants, rippling upwards in deep water; and she herself lay at the bottom of the sea looking up at them. The thought had the hallucinatory intensity of a nightmare; but she directed it, indulging it, rather than mastered by it, until, words rising at last in her mind, interlacing, making chains, she took up her pen and drew the paper towards her and wrote, with pauses in which, leaning back in her chair, she fixed her eyes on the silvery world outside:

The solemn poplars, murmuring and dark,
The poplars near my window in the night,
Stir in the midnight wind beneath the moon.
They flow and ripple like the sad sea-weed,
In air like water, ripple up the sky.

Lost in the crystal depths I seem to see
The dim moon far and high above me shine,
With ghostly loveliness above me shine,
As though it shone through fathoms deep and cold,
As though I looked through water at the moon.

And I am lonely in the midnight world,
Lonely in fathoms deep beneath the moon,
Lonely beside the flowing poplars dark,
Like a drowned heart rocked on the ocean's bed.

She had hardly finished the lines and was looking at them, already with indifference, when there came a knock at the flimsy partition between her room and the next. "Persis," said her mother's mild voice, "are n't you in bed yet?"

Persis turned a vague eye upon the wall from which the sound emanated and for some moments did not reply. Then, as if the meaning of the question had only just reached her, she answered, "No."

"Are you going to bed soon?" the voice continued.

Persis would have liked to say no, to this also, but reflecting that she was indeed very tired and that, moreover, there would be little further satisfaction in her vigils now that she knew her mother to be aware of them, she replied that she was.

"Well," came the flat, unemphatic accents, "I ex-

pect your feet are pretty cold, are n't they, and that you 'd better have a hot-water bottle."

Prose though it was after her poetry, the suggestion did not strike the young girl as ironic. She was accustomed to seeing her life in two compartments and to passing easily from the desolate loneliness of her inner experience to the peopled, cheerful outer world where her mother dwelt. She rose now, got her bottle and went into her mother's room.

Mrs. Fennamy was sitting up in bed reading, as Persis had seen her do for so many years in so many hotels and pensions. Two candles were placed upon the corner of the stand beside her pillow and she had just laid a French novel down upon the bed-clothes. She wore a pink dressing jacket over her ruffled night-dress and her abundant, if faded, golden hair was neatly twisted, on her forehead, in little implements of wire and leather. But, even at such an unpropitious moment, her placid, delicately tinted face, with its small, full, slightly withered lips, its minute nose and curiously transparent eyes, was not devoid of charm. Persis often thought that her mother looked like a doll. She suggested analogies of wax and glass and kid. Her personality was unruffled, unemotional and singularly limited and literal. Yet she could never satisfy herself as to how far the limitations extended nor as to what might be hidden beneath the literalness, and this uncertainty constituted a standing, if dim, perplexity in her life. Mrs. Fennamy never thwarted, never criticised, never complained; her affection for her

child, as unexacting as it was undemonstrative, Persis knew to be the mainspring of her existence and all her activities to be conditioned by her daughter's wishes; yet, beyond such outer adaptations, she never felt that she influenced her mother in any way, and, at moments, unexpectedly, disconcertingly, she would find herself arrested, brought to a consciousness of what, before, she had not seen, by some chance comment of her mother's, some expression of a laconic, disenchanting realism beside which her own impressions became romantic and even ingenuous. Her mother, however, occupied her thoughts very little; she was merely, in her remote fashion, aware of being fond of her and of relying upon her very much as she relied upon the comfortable things with which she associated her—*café au lait* and travelling-cushions and hot-water bottles and eau-de-Cologne. In her nomadic life Mrs. Fennamy had reduced a combined economy and comfort to a fine art.

She had raised herself on her pillows when her daughter entered and lighted the little travelling spirit-lamp that stood in readiness, as always, beside the candles. With how many nocturnal incidents Persis associated that spirit-lamp! The little saucepan of hot water was placed upon it and Persis suspended her bottle in readiness upon the back of a chair, leaning, while she waited, on the brass railing at the foot of her mother's bed.

"What is your novel?" she inquired presently, glancing at the yellow-backed volume.

"'Rouge et Noir'—Have you read it?"

"Yes, I've read it," said Persis. She could not remember a time when she had not read what she wished to read.

"It's pretty depressing," said Mrs. Fennamy; and, the water having begun faintly to sing, "Fill your bottle before it boils," she said. "The way they go is something dreadful; the neck of my new one's begun to leak already." And she then went on, picking up her book again and adjusting her pince-nez with a slender little hand, "And it's pretty improper, too. I suppose the young man gets his head cut off. I'm almost too sleepy to go on and find out to-night."

"Yes; he gets his head cut off," said Persis, smiling slightly as she filled the bottle.

"Well, he deserves it," said Mrs. Fennamy. "He's about the meanest thing I ever came across."

"He was mean, certainly," Persis assented, screwing on her top; "but there is something piteous about him, too. It's like seeing a rapid, bright little bird of prey shot down."

"Well, I can't say I feel sorry for any of them," said Mrs. Fennamy. "They all behaved about as badly as they could. What they found in him to fall in love with I can't imagine. Good-night, dear."

Persis stooped over her and they kissed affectionately.

CHAPTER II

A KNOCK came at Mrs. Fennamy's door, when Persis and her mother were having their breakfast together, and a deep, tragic voice, speaking English, but with an Italian accent, inquired: "I may come in?"

"Come in! Come in, Eleanora!" mother and daughter replied, and, the door opening, as if with precaution, an extraordinary-looking woman slid into the room, recalling, in her decorated height, her as it were sombre festivity, a may-pole by Goya.

She was tall and gaunt and sallow, her face set with dark eyes and with spacious teeth, like the ivory keys of an ancient piano. Her brow, under a thatch of dusty black hair, was ample and innocent, and she had a retreating chin and dilated, histrionic nostrils.

This was the Signorina Eleanora Zardo, an old and devoted friend, of whom Persis had said that she had the brow and eyes of a sibyl and the mouth and chin of a rabbit. "Or, perhaps," she had altered her metaphor, meditating the passionate benevolence, the extravagance and strangeness of their Eleanora, "more like a desert saint than a sibyl—Saint Mary of Egypt. Can't you see her eyes gazing at you from a cave?" Mrs. Fennamy had assented to this, adding that she

supposed Saint Mary of Egypt, also, did not very often wash. Eleanora's hap-hazard personal habits were the subject of frequent and distressed cogitations on Mrs. Fennamy's part.

Persis had defended her from the imputation. Eleanora, after all, steeped herself in mud once a year at Tannenkreuz, and that was more than one could say of Saint Mary of Egypt; but Mrs. Fennamy surmised that Saint Mary had spent her life sitting in hot sand, and that hot sand was very cleansing.

Signorina Zardo was, indeed, ambiguously dishevelled with her impenetrable hair and great, black, plumed, battered and dusty hat and her tattered silks and laces, rose and black and grey, all strangely caught together by tarnished safety pins or old cameos and mosaics. Long earrings of pearl and coral repaired with white thread dangled from her ears; the ruffled lace at her elbows was old and dingy.

Signorina Zardo was a scholar, and had lectured on Dante, in London, Boston and Berlin. Her friendships were cosmopolitan. She lived when at home, in Florence, in the darkest of little *entresols,* and gave counsel, consolation and often, from meagre resources, material assistance to numberless protégés, many of them of European disreputability. Nothing could chill or repel her devotion. On her mother's side she derived from an ancient and iniquitous family. She was the fruit of a *mésalliance;* her father had been a music-teacher.

She had come to Tannenkreuz some weeks before

the Fennamys, and was staying at a cheaper pension near by.

"My dears—what can you think or guess!"—she said, after she had placed her parasol in a corner and seated herself near the bed, where, the breakfast tray upon her knees, Mrs. Fennamy sat propped on pillows. "*Je vous le donne en cent.* I had myself no idea—not the faintest—of such a thing. He is here! Ludwig is here! I have but just seen him!"

Mrs. Fennamy looked up from the roll she was buttering. She always had her bath and did her hair before she breakfasted. Her head now was a masterpiece of compact puff and fluff and coil. The light fringe that covered half her forehead gave to her clear, incurious eyes an added and almost infantile directness. "Ludwig?" she inquired. "Who, Eleanora dear, is Ludwig?"

Persis answered her. "There is only one Ludwig, mamma; Herr Wehlitz, of course; Eleanora's philosopher friend. Is he staying in Tannenkreuz, Eleanora?"

"Yes, my child; staying here. And I had thought him in Switzerland. His health is bad. You will remember my anxieties on the score of his health. It was, I find, a sudden decision to come to Tannenkreuz. Herr Sachs advised the baths, and Ludwig then remembered that I had spoken well of them. They came on at once from the Engadine. Already, he says, he feels benefitted. Yes; he will doubtless be here for the rest of our own stay."

"I remember now," Mrs. Fennamy said, adding honey to her roll. "He is the man who writes the queer books and who quarrels with all his friends. You are the only one he has n't quarrelled with, are n't you, Eleanora?"

Signorina Zardo, at this, threw up her hands and eyes as if at an incorrigible child. "*Annetta mia!*" she murmured. "Know, my friend," she went on, smiling and shaking her head, "know that a giant such as Ludwig wrestles only with those approaching his own stature. The pigmies he leaves in peace. Why not? They can do him no affront. I, to my great Ludwig, am such a pigmy. I do not understand the meaning of the thunderstorms I see raging above my head. So I tell him. So I am safe. I do not understand his books. They are terrible and full of splendour; abysses where one sees great lights—falling—or mounting. Abysses that may be heavens"—Signorina Zardo's voice had fallen to a low note of awed melancholy as she spoke—"but not mine; not mine," she finished. She counted herself an idealist free-thinker; yet the roots of her Church were deep in her.

Persis, who had glanced away from her and back at her and up at the ceiling and out of the window, while she was speaking, now said: "You pretend not to understand his books so that you need not quarrel with him, so that you may keep him your friend. You do understand them and you abhor them."

For a moment Signorina Zardo, fixing her great

eyes upon the girl, contemplated her in silence. Then, her face softening to a half playful, half cajoling smile, she again shook her head and, putting a finger to her lips, said in a stage whisper: "And if it is so, Persis? If it is so? I throw myself upon your mercy!"

"I won't betray you," said Persis slightly smiling. "He shall keep his only friend as far as I am concerned."

"Ah—but you are mistaken—I am not his only friend. He still has friends, and devoted friends, with him. Herr Sachs is such a one, and Graf von Lüdenstein should be counted among them. And I want him to make yet another," Signorina Zardo went on, leaning to the young girl and taking her hand. "I want him to know our Persis; our poetess; our strange dreamy head. You are to meet. And if you have often heard his name on my lips be assured that he has often heard yours."

"We must meet, of course," said Persis, "but whether to be friends is another question. I may like the man less than his books—for his books I do like—they do not frighten me at all. Do you remember, Eleanora, three years ago in Florence, the day I cut my hand and you took me into your room to bind it up, and I leaned over your dressing-table to see the photograph standing there? It stood next to one of me—that may have been a good omen—and I spotted it with blood when I took it up, and that may have been a bad one. But you told me then that he was

your great unhappy friend and that I—though I was only sixteen—was the only woman you had known who could understand him. I have always wished to meet him, too, since then."

Persis Fennamy spoke with a singular maturity. She had been versed since childhood in foreign tongues, and her own had come to be but one among many, to be used with the same ease and the same exactitude. There was nothing girlish, nothing careless or excessive in her use of words.

"I remember. I have always remembered. I have always intended that you should meet," said Signorina Zardo. "For years those two faces have stood together on my table. You have always been as different from other women as he from other men. You are fitted, as no one else whom I have known, to be his disciple. Often, in what you say, I hear his own irony, his own scorn, and his aspiration." She and Persis looked at each other, Signorina Zardo with solemnity, the young girl, though slightly smiling, with an accepting gravity.

"Has he still that big moustache?" Mrs. Fennamy inquired, pouring out her second cup of coffee. She was an abstemious little person and breakfast was, to her, the chief meal of the day. "I remember that photograph. I never liked those big, gushing moustaches. I always think a man must have a weak mouth when he wears such a big moustache."

Mrs. Fennamy often disconcerted Signorina Zardo. She was disconcerted now and glanced at Persis,

murmuring: "Weak? There is nothing in Ludwig that is weak. Strength is his creed; he is the apostle of strength. It is a mere matter of fashion, the way in which a man may choose to wear his moustache . . . Is it not so, *chérie?*" She was troubled. Her eyes dwelt almost with appeal on Persis.

"Of course it is," said Persis, taking up her neglected cup of coffee. "Like the colour of neck-ties or the cut of trousers. How horrid; my coffee is quite cold."

"There's plenty more milk here," said Mrs. Fennamy, pouring the tepid contents of the milk-jug into her ubiquitous saucepan. "Heat it on the spirit-lamp." And she went on as unpolemically as if the milk alone were in question: "Glaring eyes are n't a matter of fashion, anyway. I think a man whose eyes glare when he is being photographed must be weak in some ways. It 's all very well to glare when you 're looking down an abyss." And she added, since to this there was no reply: "And as for trousers, you know, Persis, you never could bear that young Englishman we met on the Riviera, because his trousers were too loose."

"It remains to be seen whether I shall be able to bear Herr Wehlitz, since his moustache is too big," said Persis. "When are we to meet, Eleanora? I promise you to see the moustache and the glare in true proportion. I imagine that I shall be able to forgive them to him."

"Oh, my dear, forgive! He is not one to need

forgiveness!" Signorina Zardo murmured, vexed, almost to tears, it was evident, by her friend's levity. "But for the meeting, that is not yet arranged. I am to go to his hotel at one—he is at the *Beau Séjour* —and then we will see what can be settled. Ludwig is capricious, uncertain, and by no means re-established yet in health. He cannot count upon himself."

Persis stood watching her milk slowly heave in the saucepan and since she was silent Signorina Zardo went on to say that Herr Sachs, Ludwig's devoted friend, had come with him to Tannenkreuz and, indeed, had been with him for over a year now. He was a cripple; an admirable little person. Graf von Lüdenstein, too, a very brilliant man, a man of the world, had come in order to be near Ludwig, for whom his admiration was unbounded.

Persis now laid the little silver strainer on her cup and poured out her hot milk, and, as she came back to her seat, she remarked that they could meet Herr Wehlitz that afternoon at four in the *Kur-Garten.*

Signorina Zardo, had she been less gladly preoccupied, might have perceived from the young girl's slightly sulky air that in her own betrayal of uncertainty she had blundered.

CHAPTER III

MRS. FENNAMY and Signorina Zardo had met twelve years before at a Swiss hotel where their modest *au quatrième,* united by a balcony, overlooked a great lake and a range of snowy Alps.

Persis had then been seven years old, an unusual little girl, with brilliant, glancing eyes, dark brows and radiant hair falling to her waist. Her clothes, too—for Mrs. Fennamy had always known how to dress her child—had been unusual; little cloaks of poppy-red silk over white lawn frocks; small black shoes, like those of Alice-in-Wonderland, strapped across white socks, and shell-like little hats of fine white straw. It was the child, rather than the unobtrusively elegant mother, who had first attracted Signorina Zardo's attention as she stood leaning on the balcony, gazing with pondering, perplexed brows at the sunlit evening clouds. "Is it an only child, madame?" she had inquired when the little girl had been taken away to bed and she and Mrs. Fennamy, divided only by an iron railing, sat over their coffee.

"Yes; she is my only child," Mrs. Fennamy replied.

Mrs. Fennamy neither invited nor repelled casual acquaintances. Signorina Zardo seemed to her rather

ridiculous-looking, and distressingly unkempt, but she was quite willing to talk to her, dimly aware of something in the aspect of the melancholy Italian which pleased her more than her untidiness displeased. She had had no opportunity to make acquaintances other than casual. Her friends, the gentry of a small, far-away American town, were not of a kind who could offer European letters of introduction. When they went to Europe, a rite almost as punctually accomplished as "coming out" or confirmation, they were occupied, solely and perforce, with the sights of the countries they visited and not with their societies. The people in Ashleyville could n't imagine why Annette Fennamy should care to go wandering about with her child as she had now done for two years; for her letters never conveyed the least appreciation of the opportunities for culture amongst which she moved. Nor did she write of people. Her life seemed a serene and aimless oscillation.

"A very unusual little child," Signorina Zardo pursued on this occasion, a momentous one for mother and daughter. "And you travel with her? You will educate her in Europe?—You are an American, are you not?"

"Yes, we 're Americans," said Mrs. Fennamy, "and I expect I 'll keep Persis over here till she 's grown up."

Signorina Zardo showed her surprise. "But that will be many years! You have friends on this side? Your little child has companions? She will not miss

her home?—Or are you perhaps training her to a vocation?"

"No; we don't know anybody, hardly, over here. A friend of mine is married in London, but we don't care much about her husband—and we met some people we took to a great deal in Florence." Mrs. Fennamy quite spoke as if the tastes of her child counted with her own. "But that's all. I don't think Persis misses anything. She's too young to miss anything. And we haven't a home, exactly, any longer. I'm a widow; my mother died three years ago and my father's been dead for a long time and I never had any brothers or sisters. It seemed more satisfactory to come over here than to stay in Ashleyville; not that I couldn't be very contented in Ashleyville."

"Ashleyville? Where is that? I have been in America, but I do not remember the name." The Italian lady was frankly curious.

"Well, you'd not be likely to have heard of Ashleyville," said Mrs. Fennamy with her small smile that neither apologized for the insignificance of her native place nor claimed acknowledgment for its dignity. "Yes, it's a small town." She told Signorina Zardo all about Ashleyville; its derivation from New England and Virginia; its drowsy streets, shaded by avenues of trees; its sober Colonial houses; its strict social traditions of mingled austerity and innocence. She placed it with affectionate impartiality. "Yes; it's simple in some ways; most ways, perhaps;

but not in the ways Europeans expect to find. It 's the kind of place they never seem to see. It is n't a bit crude or hurried or anxious. It just thinks it 's all right and it 's been thinking so for a good while—as good whiles go in America. It 's just as peaceful and as contented as can be and the people are the nicest sort of people, only caring about reading all the best books and bringing up their children well and having nice, sweet homes;" Mrs. Fennamy spoke with tenderness. "I could be very contented in Ashleyville," she repeated; "but I felt from the first that Persis did n't belong there."

"Indeed? She did not belong there? It was too peaceful, too kind and too rooted for your potent little child? Yes, I can understand your feeling. And what then of your larger cities? New York, or Boston? Did you think of them?"

"Yes; I thought of them; I have some friends in New York. I stayed there one winter after I married and I liked it in a way; but as far as the people went it seemed to me pretty much the same as Ashleyville. They were just the same people, except that they had better accents and that more of them had their clothes made in Paris and gave dinner-parties instead of luncheons; they were n't a bit different; and what I felt about Persis was that she was different. So I thought we 'd better leave America. I thought there 'd be more chance of being different over here."

Signorina Zardo had kept her eyes upon the little lady with deepening interest. "But it is a very

extraordinary, a very strange and valiant motive; to leave your home, your kindred and all you care for," she exclaimed. "You believe in your child's destiny. You sacrifice your life to that."

This romantic interpretation did not seem to fit in with Mrs. Fennamy's conception of the case. She shook her head saying: "I don't know about a destiny. I don't feel ambitious, exactly, about her. I just feel as if I was taking a fish out of soft-water where it did n't belong and putting it in the sea, where it did, to take its chances. It 's not sacrificing my life. Persis is the most interesting thing in my life, and the most interesting thing I can do is to give her all the chances I can."

Signorina Zardo's gaze dwelt on her as she broke a tablet of beetroot sugar to the required length and dropped it into her second cup of coffee. It was arresting to receive so strongly an impression of the indomitable, the inflexible, the purposeful from one apparently so trivial, these qualities seeming as far removed from the little lady with her fair, elaborate head and black lace frills and pale blue bows as were the snowy Alps from tablets of beetroot sugar. There was no emotion, no enthusiasm, no romance about her, yet Signorina Zardo had rarely felt more arrested by anyone.

"Signora," she said, "you and your Persis interest me greatly. Will you count me among the many new friends that your new life will surely bring you?" And Mrs. Fennamy, smiling quietly at her while she

stirred her coffee, said, "Why yes; thank you ever so much. You wont find me interesting, you know, but as Persis grows up she 'll interest you more and more, I feel sure; and you 're just the sort of friend I want for Persis. You 're different, too. There was nothing in Ashleyville a bit like you."

After that, on sunny mornings, when she and Signorina Zardo sat under the trees in the garden watching Persis play, Mrs. Fennamy would talk about her child for as long as her new friend cared to question her. Persis usually played alone, going in and out among the shrubberies with an air of absorbed and intricate drama, hiding, tip-toeing out, and racing suddenly along the sanded paths to the far wall at the lake-edge where her *bonne,* a merry, dark-eyed French woman with close white cap and agile hands, sat sewing. She seemed fond of her *bonne,* fonder, apparently, than of her mother, and would throw herself, breathlessly, against her knees, looking up at her in some secret triumph. She did not seem to care at all for dolls. Signorina Zardo never saw her with one. "No," said Mrs. Fennamy. "She likes to look at them at first, if they are pretty and nicely dressed; but then she puts them away and seems to forget all about them. And she does n't care about other children, either. I asked her why she did n't play with that little Canadian girl who is always following her about and she said she did n't like her, and when I asked why, she thought a moment and said it was because she wore earrings. I don't like a child to

wear earrings myself, do you? And she says she does n't like the way another little girl's hair smells—it 's perfectly clean hair, you know—only she says it has a funny, soapy smell. Sometimes I think she has n't much heart," Mrs. Fennamy went on dispassionately. "We met a poor old beggar-woman with one eye yesterday, and when we saw her Persis ran up to me and took hold of my skirt as if she wanted to be protected—she seems really to be afraid of anything ugly or unpleasant—and I told her it was n't brave to act like that, and to try and see if she could n't be brave, like Hercules when he killed the Hydra, and give the poor old woman a ten centime piece. And do you know what she said—looking up at me, her little face all white and set—'Why does n't some one kill the old woman?' I told her the Hydra was bad," Mrs. Fennamy continued after giving Signorina Zardo the opportunity for a vague murmur, "and that the poor old woman was good, and then she asked me how I knew she was good, and I could n't think of anything to say except that the Hydra would have tried to tear us to pieces, but that all that the old woman wanted was a little money to get herself some food and that I 'd give it to her myself if she was too cowardly; and that braced her up and she said: 'Let me give her five francs, then, she can only get two sticks of *sucre d'orge* for ten centimes.' So I gave her a franc—I thought five too much—and when she came back and we walked away she was rubbing the hand the old woman had taken, and when I asked her

why she did that—the old woman had looked quite clean and nice—she said: 'Her hand was like a hen's foot, mamma, and she smelt like a hen.' She seems to go very much by smells. But it sounds as if she had n't much heart, does n't it?"

"I am afraid she will not like me, your interesting child," said Signorina Zardo with her benignant, melancholy smile. "I am ugly, and perhaps I, too, smell like a hen."

"Oh no, Persis does n't think so," Mrs. Fennamy assured her. "She thinks you smell like an old trunk of mine where I keep fur and things in camphor; it 's a rather nice smell. The trunk has a picture of the Bay of Naples inside the lid, and perhaps that made her think of it, too. I told her you were an Italian."

Persis had, as yet, made no advances towards acquaintance with her mother's new friend, but that evening, Signorina Zardo, finding her alone and leaning on the railing of the balcony, the little girl turned her eyes on her and said: "Will you tell me a story?"

"A story? What kind of a story?" Signorina Zardo asked, much pleased; "I am not good at telling stories, I fear."

"Are n't you?" Persis said, her radiant yet cold gaze dwelling on her. "But your eyes are full of stories."

"Are they, indeed? Sad ones, perhaps you think?"

"Yes; very sad," said Persis, nodding. "All the things that have happened to you, I guess. Were you whipped and starved when you were little and shut in prisons like Marie Antoinette? Did you ever see people having their heads cut off?"

"*Dio mio!* No. Such horrors were not in my day, I am glad to say; though some time, when you are older and study history, you may care to hear many wonderful things that I have heard my father tell—stories of our great Italian struggle for liberty. Dim memories, also, of my own. But no; I was not unkindly treated when I was a child. My parents died when I was still young, but the good aunt who brought me up was kind to me."

"Then, when you grew up, perhaps it was then that sad things happened," said Persis. "Perhaps robbers carried you off in a wood and put you in a dark cavern with bars of iron across the entrance—so dark that you could only see to grope your way to the bowl of water and piece of dry bread they left there for you. And at night, when they came back, you had to work and work—mending their clothes and cooking for them—by torchlight, till you grew so thin and yellow and—from being so much in the dark—your eyes got like an owl's eyes. Have you ever seen an owl in the daytime? Their eyes are just like yours."

Signorina Zardo's eyes, indeed, dwelt on her with something of the bird's nocturnal melancholy. "Strange little child," she said, "you put me into

fairy-tales. I was never carried off by robbers; yet it is not so untrue, what you say of my life; not so untrue."

Persis, after a hesitation, had given her her hand and came and stood beside her knee, looking up at her face and down at her dress and ornaments and away at the sky and lake, after the flitting fashion that Signorina Zardo had already remarked as characteristic of her. "It is not so untrue," she murmured, putting back the child's bright, turbulent hair with a gentle hand. "I have been very poor—ah, very poor—and that is, indeed, to be in a dark cavern. And those for whom I toiled—(I taught and wrote, yes, far into the night)—gave me little more than bread and water in return. And so my youth passed away, and I became thin and pale and old. Yet it was not so sad as you might think, my little Persis. You will learn that one may find treasures in the cavern of poverty and, perhaps, see angels in the dark."

"Treasures? what sort of treasures? These, do you mean?" Persis asked, touching the mosaics and chains and cameos with which Signorina Zardo's wrists and throat and breast were decorated.

"No; not these," she said, smiling, "something much better than these poor yet beloved trinkets. The treasures I mean are friends; the hearts of friends."

"Have you a great many friends?" Persis asked, leaning now against Signorina Zardo's knee as she

looked at her, some personal attraction in the gentle Italian overcoming the shrinking from physical contact so noticeable in the child. "I expect you have, because you would be so good to them."

"Yes; I have many dear friends. My life is blessed indeed."

"And did you really see angels? Aren't angels make-believes, like fairies and Santa Claus?"

"No;" Signorina Zardo shook her head. "Angels are not make-believes. But they do not come as in the picture-books. They are the thoughts of God that visit us."

They continued to look at each other for a little while after this, Signorina Zardo glad of the opportunity for influencing a young mind scantily supplied, she imagined, with spiritual sustenance; then Persis said, her eyes dilating singularly: "I pray to God every night and morning, grandmamma taught me to, years ago, when we lived in America; but I don't know who He is or how He can hear me. If He is good, why does He let things die? I saw a dead mouse in the garden yesterday. It had blood on its nose, and when I saw it was quite dead, it frightened me so that I ran away and hid for a long time in the bushes."

As she spoke, Signorina Zardo saw that she was trembling. She lifted her to her lap, the little body yielding with a curious languor, in which her new friend read the benumbing influences of the remembered fear. "Let me tell you, dear child," she said,

"God lets nothing really die. We are all with Him for ever. The time comes when our task here is done and He calls us elsewhere."

"Has He called the mouse elsewhere?" Persis asked, leaning, very still, against her shoulder.

Signorina Zardo's theology was of the most unformulated; but to a child it seemed more suitable to express it in the metaphors of her church. The question of the mouse gave her pause. Fortunately, or unfortunately, Persis passed from it. "Shall we be like the mouse some day when He calls us elsewhere?" she went on.

"Yes;" said Signorina Zardo, though with some reluctance. "Yes. We shall leave our bodies behind us when we go."

The child now sat upright and there was anger as well as fear in her widened eyes. "But I don't want to leave my body," she said. "I don't want to be like the mouse. Will there be blood on my nose, too? How do you know that I shall die?"

Signorina Zardo was much disturbed. "When the time comes we must all go," she varied her former assertion; "though, let us hope, it may not be by a sudden death, or a violent one, such as the poor mouse died. There is nothing to fear, my child. God is with us always."

But Persis slipped down and away from her arms. "I won't die," she said, standing still and looking at Signorina Zardo with a cold fixity of resolution. "I won't go when He calls me elsewhere. You may

go, if you like, and Mamma may go, and Abelline; but I will stay here."

"You would like to stay, alone, when all who loved you had left you?" Signorina Zardo spoke almost imploringly, aghast at her own predicament.

But the appeal to affection was vain. "Yes, I would rather be alone than like the mouse," said Persis.

That evening Signorina Zardo confessed to Mrs. Fennamy her discomfiture. "It was stupid of me," she said. "The child is too young to be troubled with such thoughts. I tried, it is true, to tell her of the other life, of heaven and all the happy things that we should do there; but she would not go beyond the fact of death."

"Why, that explains," said Mrs. Fennamy, "why she refused to say her prayers to-night. She said she was n't going to have anything to do with God any more. Abelline, who is a very superstitious woman, told her she 'd have to stay in Purgatory for ever if she did n't say her prayers, and Persis said she wanted to stay in Purgatory. I expect she thinks she 'll go on living if she pays no attention to God."

"But it is sad; most sad and unfortunate. A young child's prayers; they are the framework of its life. And the responsibility is mine. What would you have done in my place, *signora mia?* Was I mistaken?" Signorina Zardo inquired anxiously.

"Why no; I don't see that you were," said Mrs. Fennamy. "She 's got to find out about things some

day, and the time may come when she 'll perhaps wish she could believe there was a God to call her. I 'm an agnostic myself," Mrs. Fennamy added, without complacency or apology, " and I expect Persis will be when she grows up. I shan't try to influence her in any way. She shall decide about things for herself."

On this occasion—it was the first of many in the years to come—Signorina Zardo essayed to make a breach in her friend's unaggressive scepticism, gazing at her rather helplessly for some moment before murmuring: " But—signora, you are not—forgive me if I say it, for is it not so?—you are not enough a woman of thought to be a disbeliever. One must think much to have the right to doubt. And, I grant it you—one must think much more deeply—live much more deeply—to have the right to believe. I do not speak of orthodoxies. I speak of the fundamental spiritual needs of our lives which we symbolize by the words God, the soul, immortality."

But Mrs. Fennamy turned mild and unacquiescent eyes upon her; " I know I 'm not clever enough. I could never have thought it all out by myself. It was my husband who explained things to me. I 'd never been religious; it was that that made him take an interest in me in the beginning, he said, when he first came to stay in Ashleyville. He used to laugh at me, but it interested him; my family were all church people, and I 'd said I did n't want to be confirmed. He was a very clever man, and he was an agnostic. That 's why my family were so upset when I married

him. We were married in church," Mrs. Fennamy went on, the placid rhythm of her speech unchanged, yet with a certain alteration of tone perceptible to the Italian woman's discerning ear. "He did n't mind, and neither did I; and I knew it would have made mother so miserable if I had n't been married in church with white satin and orange-blossoms and a veil. Persis was christened, too. But we neither of us believed a bit in it, and he explained everything to me, as well as I was able to understand it, how everything began with atoms and how, when we died, all that went on was the way we 'd behaved, and how the great thing in life is to be interested, and kind to people. I don't suppose I 'll ever think any differently about it all. I 'm not likely to meet anyone cleverer than he was, ever."

Signorina Zardo, as this ingenuous recital came forth, kept her eyes on the little lady's face. Strange in her very shallowness, and mysterious as she found her, and ludicrous, too, in her childlike contentment with her sawdust creed, she still could not look at her or listen to her without a certain respect; tenderness, already, she felt. She now said, after a little silence, "Who was your husband? What was his calling? Have you a picture of him? I should be very grateful if I might see it."

"Yes; I have a picture; I 'll show it to you," said Mrs. Fennamy, the slightly altered pitch of her voice still discernible. "He was Irish. He was born in Ireland and ran away from home, and went out to

California and did all sorts of things, wrote poetry and ran newspapers. And he came to Ashleyville and had a newspaper there; it was the most brilliant paper in the state, everybody said so, and I know some people thought it was the most brilliant paper in America."

Mrs. Fennamy rose and stepped from the balcony into her room from which she presently returned with a framed photograph in her hand. "Persis looks like him, and she 's like him in all sorts of ways," she said, giving it to Signorina Zardo. "It comes out more and more."

This, then, was the heart of the story. Signorina Zardo, appraiser of human values as she was, gazed at the face, capricious, unstable, proud, gay, intolerant. She saw the child in it. Yet, raising her eyes to the wife's face, she could read the further inheritance that seemed to bind the glittering sheaf of gifts with more stubborn, more tranquil, if simpler, faculties. "I see; I see," she said, gently. "Beauty and talent and distinction."

"There was n't ever anybody like him," said Mrs. Fennamy in a low voice, turning her eyes on the Alps.

CHAPTER IV

SIGNORINA ZARDO, in her glad excitement that August afternoon at Tannenkreuz, revealed again, as they walked to the *Kur-Garten,* that Herr Wehlitz's consent to meet her friends had been wrested from some unwillingness. "He is, as a rule, the most intractable of recluses," she said, "but I have already talked to him of Persis. I recalled her to him; her deep studies, her independence, her courage; I said to him, as I have said to you, Persis, that here was the disciple, young, proud, plastic, able to bring him a homage and an understanding that would have its inspiration. For he feels himself isolated. He has swept a great solitude around him. His life is on the mountain-peaks; his former associates have fallen from him and watch him scale the heights with sullen or malignant eyes."

"He just wanders about, does n't he, Eleonora?" Mrs. Fennamy inquired, "living in pensions and hotels. Has he got any family?"

"No; no family; except an old mother who understands him in nothing. What he needs is a disciple. Herr Sachs is a devoted *garde-malade* rather than a pupil and Graf von Lüdenstein, though he so much admires Ludwig, does not trouble himself with funda-

mentals. He needs one who will sit at his knee and learn from him and then, in turn, reinterpret him to the world. I put it all before him when I went to him after leaving you, Persis, and he said, finally:—'Bring her. I will see her.' He will be there," Signorina Zardo asserted with grave jubilation. "Ludwig is one to keep his word."

To all this Persis listened in silence, slightly knitting her brows now and then and now and then turning a glance upon her old friend who, with stooping shoulders, her eyes fixed on the green of the *Kur-Garten,* walked beside her with shambling and uneven gait. Persis walked with a slow, calm step. In a day of constricted waists and irrelevant protuberances, her black silk robe fell to her ankle over a dress of muslin, fluent and unconfined, that gave her a look at once childish and nymph-like. Her small white hat was wreathed with green and on her breast hung a disc of ancient gold, curiously engraved and fretted. Mrs. Fennamy's elegance was heightened rather than diminished by the fact that her little bonnet, tied under her chin with a black lace bow, was in a bygone fashion; it was a shape she always wore and it became her admirably. Her black and azure, also, was almost invariable; there was a knot of blue on the handle of her black lace parasol and touches of blue on breast and sleeve. Mother and daughter were unusual and people turned to look at them as they passed.

They entered the *Kur-Garten.* The day was mild

and fresh. The sunlight under the trees lay in broken pools upon the sanded paths. Near the distant *Kur-Haus* the band was playing the Overture to *Leonora.*

"I told him to be at our favourite spot, beyond the grotto," Signorina Zardo murmured, pressing forward, and they turned the corner where, in the grotto, an artificial waterfall plashed and tinkled among moss and ferns.

"He is there! It is he!" she breathed.

A little avenue of interlaced lime-trees led to the secluded spot, sunny yet shaded, which had been fixed upon for the rendezvous, and here, seated at a table, were three men, who rose to their feet as the ladies appeared. One, dressed in a short black coat and checked trousers of black and white, was slight and dark; he stood erect and, at a distance, Persis felt the gaze of his intent, near-sighted eyes. Another, leaning his hand on his chair and crossing one leg over the other, was of the robust, well-fleshed, Germanic type, with a square yellow beard and eyeglasses. The third was a cripple, with broad, stooping shoulders, one leg in its clubbed boot far shorter than the other, and a large head. He leaned upon a crutch and even in the preoccupation of the moment Persis was aware of his curious face, tormented yet jocular, and its singular half-grimace of the comedian.

"My dear Ludwig! Here we are!" Signorina Zardo exclaimed, advancing with hurrying steps and outstretched hands. "A propitious day—is it not?—bright!—beautiful!—" she clasped his hand. "Sig-

nora Fennamy, Signorina Fennamy—Herr Ludwig Wehlitz;—Graf von Lüdenstein;—Herr Conrad Sachs,"—rapidly she presented them, turning her eyes again on Wehlitz. "At last I see you meet. *Je vois mes vœux exaucés*—You will sit, Annetta, here?—And you, Persis, *mia cara,* here, between me and Herr Wehlitz?"

Persis, however, had already taken her seat at the other side of the table. She laid her parasol across her knees and looked about her with a gravity almost severe.

Signorina Zardo continued to talk rapidly while Mrs. Fennamy, attracting the attention of a *kelner,* ordered tea, coffee and chocolate according to the various tastes of the company. Signorina Zardo had heard from Marius that morning, their wonderful Marius. Had Graf von Lüdenstein yet heard his new quartette? It was to be performed at Munich next week and the poor fellow was in great emotion. And Jean Piridon had been admirably hung, *médaillé* at the Salon,—did they know it? She had not seen the picture, but it was highly praised. And had Graf von Lüdenstein yet read Tolstoi's last work? Oh, she preferred the earlier Tolstoi of the "Anna" and the "War and Peace." The proselytiser had almost stifled the artist. Did not Graf von Lüdenstein think so?—Signorina Zardo addressed her remarks to Graf von Lüdenstein, for Mrs. Fennamy was engaged with the waiter and the attention of Herr Wehlitz, it was abundantly evident, was concentrated upon Persis.

This fact filled the good Eleanora with such jubilation that she talked with an almost distempered volubility. It had been a *coup de foudre*—and no wonder! Never had the child's fluctuating charm been more apparent;—those radiant eyes, childish in their clearness, their coldness, glancing, resting, passing, seeming to look at nobody; while the eyes of Graf von Lüdenstein, sleepy, amused, surprised; the eyes of little Herr Sachs, jocular and suffering; the eyes of Ludwig as he leaned back in his chair, playing with his knife and fork, a muscle twitching in his lean cheek—all were fixed on Persis. Yes; it had been a *coup de foudre.* Discipleship! Signorina Zardo's soft, reverberating old heart, filled like an ancient church, with incense and chanting, cherished other hopes. Noble, arrogant, ignorant loved ones! They could not know! But it was as if, sharing the secret with her, the statue of the Madonna smiled a benison.

They still talked of Tolstoi. "Ludwig does not care for him," said Signorina Zardo. "He feels that he is the apostle of death."

Herr Wehlitz to this said nothing, and Signorina Zardo had not intended that he should.

"A very great artist," said Graf von Lüdenstein, stroking his beard, his eyes on Persis, who, helping herself to a *Sand-torte,* ate with the vague deliberation of an uninterested child.

"I don't think Tolstoi had much taste about clothes," Mrs. Fennamy remarked, pouring out her tea. "He did n't know how to dress Anna Karénine

at all events. You remember, Eleanora, the scene where she goes to the ball at the beginning."

The attention of the party was now, if only momentarily, directed upon the little lady.

"Did not know how to dress Anna? How so, *gnädige Frau?*" Graf von Lüdenstein, adjusting his glasses, inquired.

"I think forget-me-nots don't go a bit well with black velvet," said Mrs. Fennamy. "And I don't like black velvet for a ball besides."

"I bow to the taste of a lady; it will be better than mine or Tolstoi's, that is sure," said Lüdenstein. "How would you then, *gnädige Frau,* have dressed Anna?"

"If he felt it had to be black, I'd have made it black lace," Mrs. Fennamy replied. "And I'd have made her wear white flowers with it—white jasmine for instance; something delicate and luxuriant seems right for Anna."

"It is well said; well said. Delicate and luxuriant. Yes. And Fräulein Fennamy? How would she dress the enchanting Anna?" Graf von Lüdenstein inquired, while Eleanora's glances clouded at the trivial turn which, as usual, Annetta had imparted to the conversation.

Persis, thus appealed to, drew her brows together. She was not thinking of the trivial talk but of Herr Wehlitz. Her first impression had been one of irony and a disappointment curiously bitter. She had found him insignificant and undistinguished. But, as

she had sat there, exposed to his brooding stare, the first impression had altered. What strange eyes: pained, strained, scorched, as it were, by close gazing at some burning object!—She had been more and more vividly aware of them, and their gaze, though she had not again encountered it, had filled her with a growing sense of discomfort and unpreparedness. Fierce eyes, resentful yet appealing;—and the man's whole personality expressed the same contradiction,—violence, and a sensitiveness that sought to veil itself in nonchalance. She had been aware of all this and of the muscle in his cheek, twitching, as, involuntarily, he clenched and unclenched his jaws, and of the fact that when, with a sudden clatter, he dropped his knife to the ground, he blushed deeply as he stooped to pick it up and glanced angrily around the circle as if suspicious of ridicule. Yet not once had she looked at him since that first meeting of their eyes.

Now, as Graf von Lüdenstein, leaning to her, thus questioned her, it was with a sense of effort and displeasure that she turned her eyes on him. "I beg your pardon?" she said. She had not heard his question. He repeated it and Persis bent her brows on him while he spoke with a half scornful incredulity. "Her clothes?" she repeated. "How should I dress her? Really I don't know. I do not take the least interest in how she dresses. I do not find her enchanting."

Graf von Lüdenstein opened more widely his sleepy

eyes. She spoke with the assurance and with the competent impatience of a formed and finished woman. "You do not find Anna enchanting?" he said. "You do not like her? Is it a moral judgment? Is it that you do not approve of an unfaithful wife?" Lüdenstein, evidently, had been told that the young girl he was to meet was *une tête forte.*

She looked away from him at the trees. "I do not like her because she was weak. She seems to me a negligible person. Yes; it is a moral judgment."

Turning in his chair the German leaned his arm on the table the more fully to consider her. "Ah, but it may mean strength, daring, courage, for a woman to take a lover," he contended, while Mrs. Fennamy, eating her *Sand-torte* with apparent placidity, cast a meditative glance upon her child.

Persis still looked at the trees. "It did not with Anna mean strength and courage," she said, after a pause which expressed, perhaps, dislike for her interlocutor rather than reluctance to pursue his theme.

He insisted. "If it had, then, been through strength, you would have condoned? pardoned? admired?"

"I see nothing to admire in self-deception and self-indulgence," said Persis. "It is because Tolstoi does not that I care for him. So many great artists are as deluded as their own characters in regard to the illusion and ugliness underlying what people call love."

"But this is indeed a severe judgment upon life

from lips so young. You condemn, then, all passion?"

"Do have some more chocolate, Eleanora," said Mrs. Fennamy in a low voice.

Persis had turned her eyes again on Graf von Lüdenstein and she continued to look at him with unperturbed directness while she said: "It is through passion that life and its sufferings and its evil is perpetuated. It is true that Tolstoi is the apostle of death. That is why he is so great. He sees the truth. As a thinker he has not been great enough to follow his intuition to its logical consequences. He is a Buddhist who tries to condone life. As an artist he has condemned it finally."

While Lüdenstein and the young girl thus debated their incongruous theme, Herr Wehlitz had sat listening,—motionless, his eyes dilated. Now, suddenly, he sprang to his feet and leaned forward towards Persis, resting his finger tips upon the table. "You do not know what you say!" he exclaimed in a vibrating voice while a tremor of intense feeling almost convulsed his face. "You are a child and do not know what you say! You have read Schopenhauer, *nicht wahr?*—I ask you. You have read Schopenhauer?" He rapped violently with his finger-tips upon the table.

Persis bowed assent. She maintained her calm.

"I thought so. You have read Schopenhauer and believe that he has said the last word. No; listen to me;"—he held up his hand as she sought to interpose

a qualification. "You are infected. It is enough; —listen to me now. It is I who have the last word to speak, a word that upbuilds more than it destroys. Schopenhauer saw that life is suffering and want and striving. It is true. I grant it. I flinch from nothing of his truth. But what I have to say is that life is not valueless on that account. Cowards find it so, and rot to the nothingness where they belong. You are not one of them. You cannot look me in the eyes and say that you are one of them. No. Yours is not the weakness that turns shuddering away from life. Yours is the youth and pride and strength that measures itself against life and scorns its puerilities. Tolstoi would lead the world into a nest of maggots where the weak cling together and find sustainment in loathsome unity. He cries out—'Woe to the strong. Let them lay their strength aside. Let them give themselves to be devoured by the maggots.' But we strong ones turn from him laughing. He is a sick man; a man of passion poisoned by racial fear. He is no rebel, though he believes himself one. He is no brave infidel. The exhalation of the churches has breathed its ancient infection into him and he trembles before his own desires. He is at heart a coward. Turn from him. You are no coward. I see it in your face. You are life; of life. Its joy and suffering are part of you. You will not escape them."

While he poured forth this torrent of adjuration, swiftly, fiercely, and with indescribable vehemence,

Persis, as if in answer to his demand, had risen to her feet and, from beneath, the eyes of the little circle were raised to the confronted pair. Eleanora's hands were clasped upon her breast. Mrs. Fennamy, steadying the table as Wehlitz beat his fist down upon it, kept her eyes fixed upon him with a gaze of child-like interest and surprise; Graf von Lüdenstein stroked his beard, smiling slightly and slightly blinking behind his glasses, and little Herr Sachs looked up very gravely at his blanched and shaken friend.

"You are right," Persis said after a pause and with a quiet that contrasted strangely with his violence. "Life does not frighten me. And for some it may have value. I hope to be one of them. But I intend to take what I will from it and to turn when I will from its bondage. It is this talk of passion that wearies me."

Herr Wehlitz's chest had fallen from its great breaths. He gazed, now, with half incredulous relief yet almost with a sort of anger. "Ah," he said heavily. "You fear bondage. You fear shackles. It is well. You would keep yourself true of aim; clear; undeviating; dedicated; as I. It is well. Yet do not fall into the error of the merely chaste. The flesh has its claim, if no higher claim proscribes it. I speak to you freely. You are a free spirit."

"Shall we walk a little?" said Persis. "It will be pleasanter to walk than to sit here." She ignored the others. He might have come to speculate upon her, to accept or reject her. It was she who accepted him.

She looked about, choosing her path. Herr Wehlitz put back his chair. As if automatically he joined her and, opening her parasol, Persis walked away with her philosopher beside her.

It was Signorina Zardo who broke the spell left by their departure. She leaned forward to her Annetta. "It is as I have dreamed. It is as I have prayed," she said in a loud whisper. "They have found each other."

Mrs. Fennamy took up her gloves and began to draw them on. "Do you suppose they'll expect us to wait for them here?" she asked.

"They expect nothing. We do not exist for them."

"When shall we begin to exist for them again, I wonder. I suppose he'll bring her back to the pension in time for dinner?"

"And if not? if not, my friend?' Eleanora, smiling, still whispered. "We will not intrude on sacred ground with our small conventions. Let us return. The gentlemen will excuse us"; she turned a brilliant but by no means cordial smile upon Graf von Lüdenstein, her eye softening as it rested on Herr Sachs.

"I will await the return of our phœnixes here, *mesdames,*" said Lüdenstein, bowing, smiling and tapping a book in his coat pocket. "I have my reading and a pipe. I will tell them that you have returned."

"Well, I think I would rather go home," Mrs. Fennamy conceded. "I've got my bath to take at six o'clock and I'll be late if we wait any longer.

There does n't seem much chance of their coming back soon."

"None," Eleanora assured her. "None whatever. They will not be back for hours. I know Ludwig; when once he talks it is for hours. Is it not so, Graf von Lüdenstein?"

"It is so indeed," said Lüdenstein. "The flights of the phœnix are far flights."

"And will you come with us, Herr Sachs?" Eleanora asked.

But the young man, thanking her, said that his lodgings lay in another direction, and that he must return to them. So the party broke up.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. FENNAMY and Eleanora walked slowly away together. The afternoon sunlight was shining down the little street when they left the gardens and Mrs. Fennamy raised her sunshade. Eleanora walked, gazing before her, rapt, unaware of physical conditions. Presently, however, her friend's silence roused her from her absorption. She turned her eyes upon the neat profile of her Annetta and after gazing at it, almost unseeingly, for a moment, became aware of conjecture and anxiety. Mrs. Fennamy did not look in any way displeased. There was no coldness apparent in her eye or mien; yet Eleanora, as she looked, felt the check in her gladness. Imponderable creature as she was, Annetta might still impede, retard, embarrass.

"And how does the great Wehlitz impress you, Annetta?" she inquired.

"Well, for one thing, Eleanora, I don't think he 's a bit distinguished looking," said Mrs. Fennamy in her perfectly unpolemical and matter-of-fact voice.

Signorina Zardo's face was not framed to express anger. Deep sadness was its only weapon. "Not distinguished? Ludwig Wehlitz not distinguished? I do not follow you, Annetta. His is the most rare

mind of modern Europe, the most recondite. The time will come when all will know it."

"Oh, I 'm sure his mind is rare and recondite all right," Mrs. Fennamy conceded. "Though it did seem to me rather silly, talking in that excited way to a young girl like Persis."

"A young girl like Persis! Is Persis then to be talked to like the first come girl of conventions and bondage? You will perhaps tell me next that Persis is not distinguished."

"No I shan't, Eleanora," said Mrs. Fennamy mildly. "You know what I think about Persis. But she 's too young to be talked to like that, about the flesh. I wish people would n't talk about the flesh. How old is Herr Wehlitz?"

Eleanora's answer came after a pause and in a voice that repudiated her friend's folly. "Forty-five."

"Well, I think that a man of forty-five ought to have more sense than to take a child of nineteen so seriously. He 'll turn her head. She is n't nearly as wise and grown-up as she thinks she is."

"He will fill her head. It is a great, an unusually great head, though you seem to have forgotten it. He does not see Persis as a child of nineteen. You have no understanding of the mingled insight and *naïveté* of genius. He sees her only as a soul, a proud and potent soul."

"Well, I don't like to have souls sprung on me so suddenly at a tea-party; that 's what it amounts

to, I expect. There 's not much soul about Graf what 's-his-name, anyway, is there? What fat hips he has." Mrs. Fennamy paused and put up her lorgnette before a shop-window where various gems of local extraction were displayed.

"We were not speaking of Graf von Lüdenstein. I have nothing to do with Graf von Lüdenstein. I do not like him. I do not trust him. He is a talented, a learned man, a man who profoundly admires Ludwig; that is all I know of him," said Eleanora, gesticulating with her hands and casting Graf von Lüdenstein aside.

"Well, I 'm glad you don't stand up for him," said Mrs. Fennamy. "I could n't bear him. Persis would like to have that big crystal, I expect," she added, still examining the contents of the window. "She said she wanted to get a big one to put on that gold chain of hers. I 'll tell her about it. What is Herr Wehlitz's social position, Eleanora?"

"His social position? What do you mean, Annetta? He is of noble origin."

"Is he? Who are his relations?" They were walking on.

"He descends on the mother's side from an ancient Hungarian family, now extinct," said Eleanora, but darkly, as if in loathing for the unseemliness of their talk.

"And who was his father?" Mrs. Fennamy pursued.

With sombre exactitude Eleanora informed her of

Herr Wehlitz's simple, if dignified origins, adding: "if you wish to judge a great genius by such puerilities."

"I'm not judging him," said Mrs. Fennamy. "I'm finding out about him, that's all; since I suppose he'll try to marry Persis."

At this Eleanora stopped in the little street and confronted her friend, and as Mrs. Fennamy looked back at her inquiringly she laid, for further emphasis, a hand upon her arm. "Annetta," she said in a low voice. "Let me conjure you; do not speak or think of it. Let no breath of ours touch the sacred possibility. They are unaware. They could not dream of it. If we make them aware it may part them."

"Goodness me," Mrs. Fennamy smiled. "They must be a delicate couple."

"They are, Annetta; they are; try to remember it."

They walked on and entered now the smaller street, shaded by plane-trees, where the Pension Müller stood.

"And suppose, just for the sake of argument, that I wanted to part them, Eleanora," Mrs. Fennamy remarked. "Suppose I didn't like the sacred possibility for Persis. After all I'm her mother, and after all, mothers do have their feelings. I'd never interfere with Persis, as you know, not even if she decided to marry a Chinese sage with a wart on his forehead. But I'd dislike a Chinese sage just as much as any mother would."

"Well?" Eleanora in a muted voice inquired.

"Well? And in that case what would you do? If you did wish to part them?"

"I should n't do anything. I 'd only wish. All I 'm saying is that I have a perfect right to wish."

"You dislike it, then? You do not like Ludwig?"

"I don't say I dislike him. I don't know anything about him except that he has n't got any social position and seems very excitable. Perhaps I 'll get to like him better; but I don't see why you should expect me to be on his side."

They had reached the pension gates and Mrs. Fennamy put down her parasol and entered. Then, turning, she found Eleanora's eyes fixed on her in an almost tragic supplication, her hands, in the fashion habitual with her in moments of great emotion, clasped together on her breast.

"Annetta," she said, "in God's name—I conjure you—do not take sides against him."

Mrs. Fennamy looked at her, arrested.

"He breaks my heart, Annetta," Eleanora continued. "He breaks my heart; his despair; his loneliness. You do not understand——"

"But he has lots of good friends, it seems to me, Eleanora dear," Mrs. Fennamy murmured.

Eleanora shook her head. "Friends. Do you count little Sachs, the faithful dog, with its loving, watchful eye, its tricks and wagging tail, a companion for a soul such as Ludwig's? And me! What can I do for him, a scatter-brained, sentimental old woman? I can give him nothing; I can only yearn and pray.

And for Graf von Lüdenstein he has no real liking. Ludwig is alone; alone in darkness and in despair."

"It does n't sound very cheerful, it would n't mean a very cheerful sort of marriage, would it," Mrs. Fennamy again murmured, but Eleanora, with passionate energy returned. "He is a great man; it would be a great life they would lead together. The darkness would go if she came. It is all he needs; sunlight. She is the sunrise. Let her shine on him, Annetta; it is all I ask of you; let her shine on him."

Mrs. Fennamy, touched, it was evident, but, it was also evident, not convinced, began to ascend the pension steps. "Of course she shall shine on him all she wants to," she said.

Eleanora had not followed her, but stood, her hands still on her breast, looking up at her from below.

"And I hope she 'll cheer him up, I 'm sure," Mrs. Fennamy continued. "But all the same I can't promise to want them to get married." She pressed her thumb on the bell.

"Do not take sides against him," Eleanora repeated, now in a loud whisper. "You have weight with the child. Yes; yes, Annetta; though you do not know it; though she does not know it; you have weight. Do not turn her against him. Let him have his chance!"

Mrs. Fennamy looked down at her. "I won't interfere," she said. "I don't believe I could if I wanted to, anyway, and I 've never interfered with Persis. I won't take any sides, for or against; so

there 's no reason why he should n't have his chance. All I mean, Eleanora," the door had now opened and she prepared to enter, " all I mean is that you must n't expect me to do anything to help him."

. . . . . .

It was a quarter past seven when Mrs. Fennamy heard the step of her child upon the stair. She herself had steeped for half an hour in her bath of aromatic mud and now, dressed for the pension table d'hôte, she sat before her toilet-table and looked out at the sunset while she polished her nails. She wondered, as she heard the girl's step pause, whether some unaccustomed sense of shyness would prevent Persis from coming in to her. That Persis always kept her informed of the outward facts, at least, in regard to all that happened to her, was not, her mother knew, through communicativeness or the need to confide; it was rather, perhaps, because outward facts meant so little to her that she was willing always to impart them; but Mrs. Fennamy would have felt anxiety if Persis had ceased to come to her with her daily recital. And it was relief she felt now, when, after the slight pause, the door opened and she appeared before her.

Persis was not feeling any shyness; that was evident. She was pale, as always, and with shining eyes, and it was, her mother saw, in a deep absorption and triumph that she stood there. " She thinks herself a great woman," Mrs. Fennamy reflected, " because he 's a great man, and he 's taken her so seriously."

"Well," she asked, "did you have a nice time with Herr Wehlitz?" and she added, "Dinner will be ready in a quarter of an hour. You won't have time to dress, I expect."

"No, I won't dress," said Persis, sitting down on a little chair that stood against the wall. "Yes; it was a wonderful walk. He is a wonderful man."

"I expect he is," Mrs. Fennamy assented, pausing in her placid occupation to turn her nails to the light. "I never saw such eyes. They remind me of poor little Ally Robinson's when I was a girl. Do you remember old Dr. Robinson, Persis? He was so fond of you and always brought you a little bag of marsh-mallows when he came to the house. Dear me, it's years and years since I tasted a marsh-mallow. Ally was a very bright child. He died when he was only nine, of meningitis. They thought his brain was too active."

Persis gave little heed to these reminiscences. "I remember," she murmured vaguely, "they were floury, snowy sweets, like pierrots. I really had not understood Herr Wehlitz's books, I find, though he says I have, more than anyone else he has met. His thought is like the waving of a torch, and it dazzles one sometimes and makes one dizzy. He is going to teach me and I am to help him with his work." Persis, unpinning her hat, laid it on her knees and leaned her head back against the wall. "He is coming to-morrow, and we'll sit in the garden if it's fine."

"You can sit in the parlour, if you like," said Mrs. Fennamy. "I can read up here just as well."

"Thank you, mamma, but if it 's fine I think it will be pleasanter in the garden. Graf von Lüdenstein is coming, too. He is, Herr Wehlitz says, the only one he has left who will listen to him. The others, when they have listened, have shrieked and stopped their ears and run away."

It was evident to Mrs. Fennamy that Persis was not addressing her so much as communing with herself, and at the same time she was aware that a dim, unconscious impulse in her child led her thus to explain and forestall, perhaps, even, to exculpate.

"What does he say that upsets them so?" she inquired, dipping the point of her chamois polisher into the box of nail-powder and passing to the nails of the other hand. And after a pause Persis informed her.

"He overturns all the beliefs they live by. He shows them that what they believe to be their goodness is only their weakness. He shows them that submission is incapacity and that pity is an infection. He thinks that pity is the disease of the modern world and that it may destroy us."

"I don't seem to see much of it about, somehow," Mrs. Fennamy commented.

"Oh yes, mamma, you do; the philanthropies that enable unfit people to survive and the benevolent politics that put power into their hands. The whole democratic movement is founded on pity, on the conception that the weak, the valueless, must be armed

artificially against the strong; and, since they are the more numerous, they may become a menace to the strong, if they are armed."

"I should have thought the idea was to get everybody to be as strong as they could," Mrs. Fennamy objected. "It must be pretty bad to be ground down just because you have n't any weapon. The strong people have got the strength and the weapons too."

"But there is the modern fallacy; you don't make people strong. Heredity proves that the inferior remain inferior, however much you may arm them."

"Well, now, just look at old Jesse Keene, in Ashleyville," Mrs. Fennamy urged. "Of course you would n't remember him, but before the war he was just a lazy old negro who used to potter about and do odd jobs for people; he used to come and help in Grandma's garden, I remember, when the gardener needed extra help; just a black old negro. And now his grandchildren are as respectable and successful as can be and one of them 's a lawyer. What 's that but an inferior getting made over into something better?"

"Your old negro had married a mulatto or quadroon, I suppose," said Persis smiling. "And his children had again mixed with a better blood. If a type tended to rise that would show, of course, that it had been artificially kept down. No one would deny that a good many valuable types are artificially kept down."

"Oh yes, they all married whiter people than themselves," Mrs. Fennamy assented. "They 're just

café-au-lait colour now. All the same, I should think that it was about the easiest thing in the world not to have any pity."

"You must talk to Herr Wehlitz," said Persis. "He thinks it is the most difficult thing; the thing that it costs us the most to do—to be pitiless." She stretched back in her chair, reaching up her arms, and rose, saying that she must go and smooth her hair, and pausing to look for a moment from her mother's window. The evening sun struck on the poplars, and glittering against the blue sky they made her think of splendid imperious swords pointing up and challenging the heavens. "It 's curious to think that anything interesting should happen in Tannenkreuz," she said.

CHAPTER VI

NEXT morning Mrs. Fennamy went down to the salon to glance over the *Gaglignani Messenger* some half hour after Persis had led Herr Wehlitz and his friends into the garden. Four or five pension inmates were gathered there like decrepit flies lured to warm window-panes; capped and brooched Lady Frere, a massive German lady trussed in rigid stays, a grievous, gouty old English major and a woman of some fashion from New York; and Mrs. Fennamy saw, as she entered, that, with the exception of the major, who, having secured the *Gaglignani Messenger* had withdrawn with it into a corner, they were all engaged in examining the group seated in the garden under the apple-trees.

Persis, so unaware of her fellow-guests, had been the object, since her arrival, of their somewhat hostile attention. Mrs. Fennamy was already popular. She returned now the greetings given her and moved to the window to look out also.

Her daughter and the three men were gathered at some little distance round one of the tin tables, on which books had been piled; but they were not far enough to prevent Herr Wehlitz's voice, pitched in tones of almost ecstatic vehemence, from reaching the

occupants of the salon. Persis, in her dress of flowing white, leaned back in her chair, her arms lightly folded across her breast, her head bent in the attitude of concentration habitual to her, her eyes on Herr Wehlitz. Graf von Lüdenstein's eyes were on her, though they were shaded by his hand as he sat half turned in his chair, resting his elbow on the back; and, slightly removed from the group, Herr Sachs poked his crutch here and there into the deep untidy grass. They looked, the men's black coats, the girl's white dress, dappled with sunlight, the tones, swarthy or florid or pearly, of the faces, like a *plein air* by Manet, though the picture recalled to Mrs. Fennamy was that of a St. Catherine of Alexandria among the doctors. Persis was as composed and as assured as that scholarly virgin.

"Miss Fennamy seems to have a great many tutors," Lady Frere observed, turning the stocking she was engaged in knitting and keeping, over her spectacles, a watchful eye upon the incongruous gathering. "What is she studying, pray?"

"Well, I suppose you'd call it philosophy," said Mrs. Fennamy. "Herr Wehlitz is a great philosopher and he is going to teach her."

The plethoric German lady laid down her novel. "Herr Wehlitz!" she exclaimed. "Is it Ludwig Wehlitz? Herr Gott! *gnädige Frau,* but do you know who it is then who teaches your daughter? He is an abominable man! a demoniacal man!" With astonishment and consternation she stared out

at the students. *"Das ist schrecklich!"* she exclaimed.

Mrs. Fennamy did not show perturbation, but she felt it.

"Why what do you know about him, Frau Topler?" she inquired. "He was introduced to us by a very old friend of ours, one of the very best women in the world, and though I know he has queer ideas, most philosophers have, I expect, and it does n't seem to do them any harm."

The German lady continued to stare, shaking her head slowly the while. "I have not read his books," she said. "I do not read such books. My husband would not permit it. But I have been told that they are abominations."

"Hey? What's this? Who is the demoniacal gentleman? What?" the major questioned, rising with a suppressed ejaculation of pain, for he was crippled with gout, and moving to the window, while the lady from New York swooped down upon the *Gaglignani Messenger* which, inadvertently, he had left upon his chair. "Who is it?" he inquired, joining Mrs. Fennamy at the window. He liked Mrs. Fennamy, who was always reassuring when he insisted that the baths were killing him. "Musician? hey?" he asked, as she indicated the object of the discussion to him. "Writer? What? Looks a bit of a bounder, but I don't see any harm in the fellow. Teaching Miss Fennamy is he? What did you say he was teaching her?"

"Philosophy," said Mrs. Fennamy. "He's not a bad man. He has queer ideas and thinks we're all wrong. But he would n't hurt a fly."

"Philosophy? Well, you can tell her from me," said the major, "that there's nothing in it. Absolutely nothing. You get no further than you were when you began. I tried to read Herbert Spencer once, when I was in India, and upon my word it gave me indigestion. I don't see the good of that sort of thing. Who is the other gentleman who admires Miss Fennamy so much?"

"That's Graf von Lüdenstein," said Mrs. Fennamy somewhat sadly; Lady Frere had ceased to knit and kept severe eyes upon the negligent mother. "He's a philosopher, too, I believe, or he's interested in philosophy, or something."

"He is interested in pretty young ladies; and in that he shows his good sense," the major observed, making his way back to his *Messenger* and stopping half-way, arrested by the sight of the New York lady, immersed, with elaborate unconsciousness, in her ill-gotten gains.

Mrs. Fennamy had also turned from the window. "I'll bring you a paper," she said, touched by his dismay. She left the salon and found herself confronted, in the passage, by Eleanora.

"Just wait a minute, Eleanora," she said, pushing her friend gently along in front of her and into her little sitting-room. "You're the very person I want to see." She took the paper to the major and then, re-

turning and seating herself upon the sofa, she motioned Eleanora beside her and said: "Well, they 're all talking about him and are as shocked as can be by Persis knowing him. I 'm afraid he has a very bad reputation, Eleanora."

"Reputation! Ludwig's reputation! You speak of Ludwig?" Signorina Zardo, as Mrs. Fennamy nodded, threw up her hands and eyes and ejaculated in the German which she could use racily at times: *"Schafs Köpfe!"*

"Well, but we 've got to live among the sheep, if it comes to that," Mrs. Fennamy returned. "And I don't like even sheep to be able to say that a demoniacal man is making love to Persis."

"And what would they say, Annetta, if Shelley, or Goethe, or Leopardi were making love to your child? Were they not, all of them, by the sheep, thought to be demoniacal? What else can sheep think of a sublime genius, with his world-shaking, world-renewing thought! Have you not only to look in the face of Ludwig and see the soul shining there—the noble soul—as trusting and as tender as a child's?"

"He looks very much like little Ally Robinson," Mrs. Fennamy mused, adding with an apparent irrelevance, infinitely relieving to Signorina Zardo; "Anyway, Graf von Lüdenstein has n't got a tender, trusting soul and I don't like the way he looks at Persis a bit."

"Ah; there; there I grant you. That is another matter!" Eleanora exclaimed. "There I am with the

sheep! You know that he is a married man, Annetta?"

"Why no! is he?"

"He is, indeed. And from all I hear his wife is not to be envied."

"You mean he's a bad man, Eleanora?" Mrs. Fennamy's inflection was the inflection of Ashleyville.

"I mean that he is a dissipated man; a man of lax morals. Yes; most certainly." And Eleanora pressed her advantage. "Of Ludwig's life there has never been a whisper. I defy the assembled sheep to deny that Ludwig's life has been a spotless one. It is that Gargantuan female, that Berlin merchant's wife whose judgment has troubled you, I will warrant. And all that I ask of you is: What would the verdict of such a woman be on Shelley?"

Mrs. Fennamy mused. "I'd be very sorry if Persis were to marry anyone like Shelley," she said, and then she added, rising, "Let's go and sit in the garden with them, Eleanora. I'd like Graf von Lüdenstein to think that Persis is a chaperoned girl, even if she is n't."

"Let us go. By all means let us go." Eleanora with full approbation assented. "But you will not give an observer as keen as Graf von Lüdenstein the impression that Persis is a conventionally sheltered girl; he will have seen from yesterday that she is not."

Eleanora bowed with ceremony to the occupants of

the salon as they passed through it, turning as they stepped from the window near the German lady's chair to link her arm in Mrs. Fennamy's and say, pointing out the group below: "Do they not look charming, *mia cara?*"

Outside the window a flight of cracked concrete steps led to the garden. Surrounded by its high walls it was very warm to-day and redolent of autumnal fragrance; the smell of the deep grass, of the apples reddening on the branches. Distant wafts from the pine-woods reached it and from the russet vineyards, and even the sun-baked walls of the pension, its white stucco flaked and peeling, its green shutters faded to the blue of a spoiled turquoise, gave forth an exhalation as of musty spices.

The three men rose to their feet as Mrs. Fennamy and Signorina Zardo approached and saluted them. Persis looked up at them vaguely.

"Well, Persis, are you learning a great deal?" Mrs. Fennamy asked, pausing beside her daughter's chair and casting a look at the books piled upon the table. None had yet been opened. Herr Wehlitz's monologue had occupied them till now.

"Unlearning a great deal, rather, I think," said Persis.

"I should n't have thought you could do that," said Mrs. Fennamy. "It 's not as if you 'd ever believed in anything much."

Wehlitz's eyes, meanwhile, almost as if he saw her for the first time and recognised her as a possible fac-

tor in his relations with the young American girl, examined the little lady. She wore a thin black dress, of summer coolness, small turquoises shook at each ear-tip and she carried her work-box and sewing. Herr Wehlitz, it was evident, found pleasure in her appearance, "You are not opposed, madame, to this quest upon which your daughter has embarked?" He could speak and smile with the greatest gentleness and a courtly chivalry of manner mingled, as he addressed her, with a hint of playfulness. There was indeed something very child-like in Mrs. Fennamy's elegant little personality. Herr Wehlitz, evidently, thought of her as child-like—as soon imagine a small blue butterfly an envoy of destiny.

She smiled back at him. "Dear me, no," she said. "Persis embarks on anything she likes. I thought, when she was sixteen, she was going to join the Nihilists; we 'd been seeing a good many Russian exiles in Rome that winter. I don't suppose your philosophy is as dangerous as Nihilism."

"I fear the risks of Nihilism are child's play compared to my Alpine climbing, madame," Wehlitz replied.

"So long as it 's only philosophy I don't care how far she climbs," Mrs. Fennamy returned.

Still with his touch of playfulness, Wehlitz bent his eyes upon Persis. "And you wished, then, to be a Nihilist?—To pull down the strong?—To exalt the weak?—And by violence?—Is it possible?"

"Yes; it was so; for a little while," said Persis.

Her eyes were not on him but on the lombardy-poplars which, beyond the apple-trees, rose above his head. "When I saw how foolish they were, the people themselves—not, necessarily, their ideas,—I gave it up. I was only a child. No; I never wanted to exalt the weak and pull down the strong. I wanted to pull down the mean and cruel and crafty."

"Ah—craft—cruelty—meanness—you will find them always among the weak—among your former friends, for instance," said Wehlitz. "The strong do not need them. Or, if they must use cruelty, much less. Russia will not be corrupted so long as she maintains her despotism. It is we who are in danger, with our life-destroying, so-called humanitarian, creeds that infect the strong with pity for the weak. I spoke to you of this yesterday. Do not misunderstand me. I have no hatred for the servile classes when, in their proper place, they serve the purposes of those above them. But in our days of hideous democracy the plebeians, ceasing to fulfil their only function, swarm into our palaces like vermin and devour all that is beautiful and rare. My gorge rises at that! Moist, dank parasites, clinging together, mounting in their shoals of heaped up paltriness:—pfui! the tepid stench of them is in my nostrils! I see the glint of their malicious, shifty eyes. Beat them back!—with the flat of the sword!—you will not need to use the point; beat them back; it is the only way. Crush them into their dens again and give them again their tasks to do!" He had spoken with a rising excitement, em-

phasizing his words by blows from his fist upon the books piled before him; but now, raising his eyes again to Mrs. Fennamy and finding that she stood contemplating him as a child might contemplate the interesting antics of a strange animal in its cage, his voice fell, he smiled again, nervously, and said, turning to Lüdenstein, "You feel no extravagance in my words, Ernst?"

Graf von Lüdenstein, leaning on the back of his chair, had been listening with a smile. "None; none, my dear Ludwig," he replied. "I agree with you to the full in seeing that nature is relentless and that those who fall away from her precepts are preparing themselves for extinction. At the same time I do not altogether share your fears for the strong. They will always, I imagine, contrive to surmount the weak. It may be, in the future, by outwitting them. One cannot tell."

"Ah; but there you are wrong; there you make your mistake of over-confidence!—They are simple, the strong;—simple!" Ludwig cried. "Wits are the ugly mandibles of the vermin, sharpened by necessity. No! no! no!—it is by force, proud, relentless, smiling force alone, that the strong survive. We have talked of this."

"Let us sit here, Annetta, under this tree," Eleanora said, moving away to an adjoining table with sadness. "We can listen to the interesting discussion or talk together, as we choose."

Mrs. Fennamy followed her, laying her work-box

on the table. She remarked in a low voice, as she seated herself and unfolded her work: "Does he think we are vermin, I wonder? I'm sure I don't feel very proud or relentless."

"He speaks with extravagance, Annetta, and with his own use of violent metaphor. It is the rare, the precious, the beautiful things, the things that make life of value to both high and low that he sees menaced and would preserve. As to him—I know no heart fuller of pity, of tenderness and pity, than Ludwig's." Eleanora spoke with a note of pleading. She feared Annetta, feared her understandings of Ludwig as well as her misunderstandings of him. It was difficult to interpret a titan to a butterfly.

"My, yes; anyone can see that he would n't hurt a fly." Mrs. Fennamy repeated her fundamental assurance. "Only it must be very bad for him, getting so excited."

The group at the other table had now resumed their seats and Wehlitz, passing his hand over his forehead was saying: "Back to Schopenhauer, then, and let us forget, for the moment, the weak and their menace. As I was saying to you, Fräulein, you do not contradict a great thinker, you complete him. Schopenhauer is valuable for his half truth. Facing the illusions of goodness, of freedom, of the self, he would lead us to despair of life and to resignation. It is there that I come to you. It is there that I complete our acrid, flaccid pessimist. Face illusion; yes; but face despair as well. Seize it; master it; and tragic joy is its

flower. Despair sinks to death and nothingness; tragedy accepted is life at its highest. I teach, not resignation, but serenity; not the peace that will only look at the flat, safe path beneath its feet! no! a serenity sublime and terrible. It can smile in its strength at its own and at others' pain, at its own and at others' anguish; it has risen above pity and horror and fear; it rejoices in them as an athlete in his opponent's strength; as a swimmer in the buffets and abysses of the sea."

His gaze, half hypnotised, almost hypnotic, was again on Persis. She said: "I have felt that."

"You do not need to tell me so," said Wehlitz. "I have seen it in your face."

"But," after another moment, Persis went on, "I must think. I must think a great deal, and study. I do not really understand you yet;—not all you say."

"And I do not ask, I do not expect, any blind adherence. Yes. We are to study, you and I. And, together, we will discuss our studies, you and I, and Lüdenstein." His eyes turned from the last-named friend to Herr Sachs, who still sat a little withdrawn from them. "And you, Conrad, shall come too, to our discussions, gall and wormwood though my doctrine should be to you, if you were honest with yourself. You can come as the *bénitier* to the devil! ha! ha! He is a believer, our friend Conrad, Fräulein. He believes in God, in freedom, in the immortal soul, do you not, Conrad? He is a mystic; yet it is a sound,

good head that he thus stultifies. Some temperamental aberration misleads him!"

Herr Sachs was laughing as at some well-worn joke. Persis looked at him with some wonder. "Do you really believe in those dogmas?" she asked.

The young man grimaced, discomposed, apparently, by her notice. "By no means, by no means, Fräulein—I am a devil-worshipper"—he exclaimed, still laughing rather incoherently; "am I not a friend of Ludwig's?"

"Do not believe him; his is no such dignified creed," said Wehlitz. "He seeks to hide his infamy from you. Aha, Conrad, the Fräulein has eyes like the dawn—like the dawn over the sea; she can see into your quaint Christian soul. He has never stepped freely from his cradle, Fräulein, it rocks and rocks him still, and the bells of Christmas chime in his head." He was looking, not untenderly, yet with a sort of latent irritation at the young man. "Is it not so, Conrad? Will you deny that, in essentials, you may be counted as a Christian?"

Suddenly, at this, and to the astonishment of Persis and her mother, Herr Sachs gave a long, clear cock-crow, and then, snapping his fingers rapidly in the air, still grimacing, he got up, adjusting his crutch beneath his arm. "I shall escape you, Ludwig," he said. "I shall run away from your questions. Yours is an inquisition worse than that of Spain. I shall talk to the ladies." And again he crowed as he limped to join Eleanora and Mrs. Fennamy. "Lud-

wig is mocking me, signorina," he said, drawing a chair beside them. "I take refuge with you."

"You are still an admirable mimic, Herr Sachs," said Eleanora, kindly if with a certain severity. "Your cock startled me. I thought myself just awake."

"But what a glorious sound, signorina, is it not? and comic, too, a cock's crow," said Sachs, glancing with some timidity at Mrs. Fennamy, whose courteous scrutiny did not conceal astonishment. "It fills one with mirth, and sadness. Do you not find it so? It is full of the early day, and yet so old, so very old. There is nothing that seems to me so old. I think always of Ulysses and Ithaca when I hear a cock crow—Ithaca seen at dawn over the dark sea. Does it come in the Odyssey? I do not remember." Herr Sachs, it was evident, sought to efface the memory of his extravagance.

"You still keep Ludwig always amused, always gay, when you are with him, I see that," said Eleanora, lifting her eyes to him from her crochetting. A ball of linen thread was in her lap and a narrow band of lace lengthened under her fingers. Yards of this lace she presented to her friends at the New Year. Persis had had it at the edge of her petticoats almost as long as she could remember.

"Yes, yes, I keep him amused, very often. But it does not amuse him when we discuss religion. He does not like that at all. That is why I ran away," said Herr Sachs, still with his touch of bashfulness.

"Herr Sachs, I must tell you, Annetta," said Eleanora, "has been a very wonderful friend to Ludwig. He has nursed him through a dangerous illness. Had it not been for you, Herr Sachs, I do not think that Ludwig would have survived, when, in the Riviera, he was taken so ill, a year ago. Oh, it was a terrible time."

"He was ill; yes, he was very ill," said the young man. His face had changed as rapidly in expression as a dog's when it lowers pricked ears. "But I do not deserve such thanks," he added. "It is Ludwig who has been a wonderful friend to me."

"Ah, I know that, too," said Eleanora, with conviction. "And what a friend is our Ludwig! What kindness! What loyalty! What depth of heart!"

"Yes, yes, he has all that," said Sachs, nodding.

"Tell me," Eleanora went on, "how do you find him now? The waters do him good?"

"It is too soon to tell, signorina, but I hope much from them. He is far from well. He has a great deal to trouble him."

"This silence, you mean: this silence that falls about his work. It is like a dark well, a well into which stars fall and are extinguished."

"Yes; that is well said," Sachs nodded, "well said indeed, signorina. And he cannot shake off the thought of that silence. It weighs upon him. He fears that his message may not come to the world. And now, the great prose poem: it is just to be issued. He has begun to read the proofs and re-lives it all."

"You have seen it? It is a masterpiece?"

"No, I have not seen it; he will not have me see it until it is in book form. But I believe that it will be his masterpiece, signorina. He has put into it his whole heart and mind."

Mrs. Fennamy now asked: "Is n't it Herr Wehlitz's digestion that is wrong? If it is, and he looks to me like it, the waters are sure to do him good. Nothing upsets one's digestion so much as worry. You remember, Eleanora, that winter when Persis had fever, in Florence; I 've never really been right since."

CHAPTER VII

SIGNORINA ZARDO, full of her hopes, made her way that evening to the *Hôtel Beau Séjour*. The three men were there in Ludwig's salon; little Sachs at the centre table, leaning on his hand and silent, as he so often was in Lüdenstein's presence, and drawing, as was also his wont, neat little pictures of flowers and birds on a sheet of the hotel note-paper; Lüdenstein extended in a chair, a pipe between his teeth and a tall glass of beer beside him; while Ludwig half sat, half lay on the sofa that stood against the wall between the windows. Ludwig and Lüdenstein, it was evident, were engaged in an altercation. There was always a latent rivalry and antagonism in Ludwig's attitude to this follower, for although a follower, Lüdenstein's allegiance was confined to intellectual matters and his appreciation of his friend did not go beyond suavely defined limits. In his manner towards Ludwig, personally, there was no homage; at times, indeed, though Wehlitz was the senior by five years, he treated him with the affectionate irony of an older towards a much younger man, the tolerant indulgence of a man of the world towards a man who could claim no such experience. How deeply, if dimly, Ludwig resented these implications, Eleanora was aware, and

his resentment was revealed in a provocative self-assertion, in the need, constantly betrayed, of proving to himself as well as to Lüdenstein, that he was Lüdenstein's follower in nothing. "Welcome Eleanora, welcome!" he cried now, and with an exaggerated gaiety, as she entered. "You come most opportunely. We were talking of your friends and Lüdenstein and I are not of one mind on the subject. I find that Fräulein Fennamy has beauty, great beauty, as well as unusual intelligence. I find her appearance of the greatest distinction. Lüdenstein will consent neither to beauty nor distinction."

Lüdenstein, puffing quietly at his pipe, held up his hand. "Gently, my friend, gently," he smiled. "You overstate our difference; I suspect that there is little distinction of blood in Fräulein Fennamy, but I have not denied that she possesses, in a marked degree, the curious acquired distinction so characteristic of her country-women. As to beauty, no. No, my Ludwig. There is no beauty in that sullen, brilliant, brooding little face. Force, fire, charm, yes, I grant them freely, but not beauty. The face is incoherent, and has no significance of form; undress it of its intelligence, and you find the mother's triviality."

Eleanora had seated herself at the table near Sachs and had stripped off her long gloves and unwound the scarf from her neck, her eyes fixed upon Lüdenstein while he spoke. She caught up the gauntlet thus thrown down. "It is not triviality, Graf von Lüdenstein. The face of my friend, Madame Fennamy, is,

I have often thought it, like that of some minute flower, so small, so unobtrusive in its delicacy, that one might pass it by as insignificant. But pause, examine it closely, and you will find what the minute and delicate may express of power and purpose. Madame Fennamy has more of both, let me assure you, than any other woman I have known; and among significant women my experience has perhaps been wider than even yours! And if you speak of blood," Eleanora added, "I have been to the American States and may also assure you that in those mingled currents there are many strains of antique race as good as any that we can boast of. How could it not be so?"

The gratitude in Wehlitz's eyes, while she thus answered Lüdenstein's challenge, was a guerdon and a spur to the devoted woman. "Lüdenstein's ideal is our blonde, bland Germanic female," he said, "sleek, submissive, sensual. We must not ask him for a judgment upon types as foreign from his apprehension as Mrs. Fennamy and her daughter. Of the mother, you speak my thoughts, Eleanora, a graceful and a finished woman of the world, well fitted to foster a more precious flame of life. The father, I think you told me, showed the strangeness, the power, so apparent in the child. But let us have your opinion, Conrad. Your tastes, we can be sure of it, are not Lüdenstein's. The sleekly sensual is not for you, not for you Lüdenstein's courtezans and sentimental *Mädchen*.— Come, Conrad, do you find Fräulein Fennamy beautiful?"

As he spoke—Lüdenstein laughing softly the while, shaking his head and ejaculating: "A woman of the world! Ta-ta-ta!"—Wehlitz turned on his sofa and fixed his eyes upon his young friend who continued to draw his flowers and birds.

"I find her very beautiful, Ludwig," he answered, not looking up from his paper. "She brings old fairy-tales into my mind: a princess imprisoned, imprisoned in a lonely tower beside the sea. Did you not say this morning that her eyes were like the dawn over the sea? I find them so."

"Here," Lüdenstein murmured, "we have our authority on beauty and distinction."

Wehlitz continued to gaze so steadfastly at the young man that Eleanora could not tell whether he had caught the comment.

Then, at last, "It is well said, well said, Conrad," he returned, "and your judgment has value, for yours is a poetical mind; yes, the golden bees of old German romance still hum and sing in your brain. We look for honey from you, one day, Conrad. You have seen what I have seen, the element of poetry in this young girl, of the remote, the mysterious, the inaccessible. You told me, Eleanora, that she wrote poetry?"

"Ah, she would hardly consent to have it called so," said Eleanora eagerly. "I call it poetry, you might not. Strange thoughts visit her and she exhales them, without effort, without consciousness, as a flower its perfume. Yes; I hope some day to show

you what she has written. She refuses to think of publication. She has no ambition."

"For my own part, though you lend me different tastes, my Ludwig," Lüdenstein here remarked, as if continuing placidly the train of his own thought, "I admire the Fräulein's figure: fine, firm, supple, and well rounded, too, for one so young. The wrists, too, are well turned and the ankles. The knees and elbows would also be charming. Yes; I admire her figure unreservedly."

There was silence for a moment. Sachs did not lift his eyes from his drawing but his colour rose until it was evident that the young man was hotly blushing, a blush of anger rather than of embarrassment; and Wehlitz, though the twitching muscle in his cheek betrayed his extreme irritation, went on after a moment, as though he had not heard: "You know my fondness for you, Conrad, and since our meeting with her yesterday I have been aware how deeply this young girl appealed to you. I have sharp eyes, Conrad. Is it not true that you feel deeply for her?"

Sachs looked up now, gravely. He did not reply and Wehlitz, as if he had not expected a reply, went on: "She has a small fortune, Signorina Zardo tells me; very small as American fortunes go, but amply sufficient to secure freedom from all base annoyances. And I, for my part, would see that you were not empty-handed, Conrad. The idea will no doubt seem fantastic to you, yet I mean it most seriously when

I ask you, why should you not marry this young American?"

Sachs's pencil had remained motionless. He sat gazing at his friend.

"Was it not love at first sight, Conrad?" Wehlitz inquired, with a gentle rallying air.

"*Dio mio!*" Eleanora exclaimed, clasping her hands on her breast.

Sachs, after his long stare, was blushing again. He sat, his face brightly illuminated by the lamp, a helpless target for all their eyes. Lüdenstein had thrown back his head and was laughing.

"Love at first sight, Ludwig?" said the young man, now in a severe voice. "What have I to do with love at first sight? You do the young lady an unkindness by your jests. Her name has been already too lightly treated."

"But I do not treat it lightly! I do not jest! I speak with all seriousness," Wehlitz cried, his excitement breaking through the mask of gaiety so evidently assumed. "I see the disparities as clearly as you can and I say, deliberately, that they are atoned for by your qualities of mind and heart. Yours is a fine and powerful mind, misuse it though you do, and you are capable of an infinite devotion—who should know that better than I?—and women need devotion. She is not as other women, this young girl, she is above them; she scorns their parasitic impulses; yet she could be taught what they imply of development. She could be taught that a woman's highest

mission is to be the mother of great men. It is not her right to shut herself away from this claim the future has upon her. It is the future that calls to her. I believe that your and Fräulein Fennamy's children would be exceptional."

His urgency, his excitement, his extravagance appealed, evidently, too much to Sachs's sense of humour for his severity to maintain itself. His face, while he listened, twisted in a grimace of unwilling mirth and as Wehlitz ended, he burst into a laugh. "Ludwig! Ludwig! Ludwig!" he said, "You look me in the face—fortunately, for the moment, my legs are hidden!—and you speak to me of hereditary advantages! The poor Fräulein! the unfortunate princess, indeed! to be handed over to a plebeian cripple who can barely earn his bread and who would bequeath to his children his clumsy form and his ugly clown's face! It is a picture to draw tears as well as laughter—is it not, signorina? and I can see the young lady's expression as it was proposed to her. I beg of you, Ludwig, for the sake of your friendship with her, do not let your brilliant idea go further!"

"Herr Sachs speaks the truth, Ludwig," Eleanora said. "It is an unseemly jest. Do not let it go further. It would seriously displease Persis. I can assure you of that."

"I do not see it as an unseemly jest. I repeat that I do not see it so," Wehlitz cried, with increasing vehemence. "Why should you imagine me incapable of appreciating that young girl's claims as well as

you and Conrad, and of having, I dare swear, as keen a regard for her dignity. I do not agree with Conrad as to his face; ugly it is, but full of force; and Fräulein Fennamy's distinction will atone for his lack of it. No, I do not see it as a laughing matter. It is not my custom to make unseemly jests. She should be married, that young girl. She should be the mother of great men."

"Then why not the mother of your children, Ludwig?" said Sachs. "Why should not you marry the young lady? Aha! I turn the tables on you! It is your turn to change colour! Why should not the future call to her through you? You can give her fame as well as devotion, and you have some fortune, too, and are of good birth."

Wehlitz's brow had darkened. "No," he said, "that is not well of you, Conrad. I spoke in love for you. It is not a subject for mockery."

"But I do not speak in mockery, Ludwig. I speak in earnest; more earnestly, at all events, than you can speak."

"You know my views as to social ties," said Wehlitz darkly; "they are not for me. Marriage would, to me, mean, inevitably, fetters, compromise, frustration. Say, if you like, that it is a weakness I recognize in myself; yes, say that it is a weakness," he repeated fiercely, casting a covert glance upon the imperturbably smiling Lüdenstein, "and that if I allowed myself to love I should love too deeply and too absorbedly. I know the dangers of my own tempera-

ment. My thought would become lessened, crippled, my personality would alter and lose its edge. Is it not my mission in life to keep my blade sharp and clear? No; no home, no children, no wife for me. Marriage, for the prophet, is an impossibility." Wehlitz, as he spoke these last words, turned over on the sofa and lay at full length, facing the wall.

"But why speak of marriage at all, Ludwig?" Sachs inquired mildly after a little silence. "Fräulein Fennamy shares your views, as we heard from her yesterday." He glanced, smiling, with lifted brows and merrily puckered lips at Eleanora, who, not accustomed to take her great men lightly, looked back at him with some solemnity. Sachs added a large fluted tail to one of his birds.

"She may think so," Wehlitz took up the challenge after another moment; "she may think so, in her proud ignorance of life. But woman cannot stand alone. Woman must have another mate than thought. Woman, when she is not a mother, is a contradiction, a nothingness. So strongly do I feel this necessity concerning our young friend that, were he not already married, I should urge the same suggestion upon Lüdenstein, though, I owe it frankly, I should prefer you, with all your disabilities, as a husband for her, Conrad." He had continued speaking, with his face turned to the wall, but the fingers of his hand, as it lay upon his thigh, contracted continually and nervously; now, as he listened for Lüdenstein's answer, they became still.

Lüdenstein, it seemed, had hardly ceased to laugh since the beginning of the discussion; and, before speaking, he lit another match and bent his head, shaken by quiet, internal merriment, to draw at his freshly filled pipe. "Would you, indeed, my friend? Would you indeed?" he commented. "I am honoured and gratified by your choice even though it is only a second choice, a *faute de mieux*. But no, my Ludwig, I could under no conceivable circumstances enter your romantic counsels. The Signorina, who is at home among men, will pardon my frankness if I say that woman is for me a toy, a relaxation, a gratification, and nothing more. Surely, then, you could hardly, had I been free for distribution, have chosen me as a mate for our soaring young friend, who sees herself as so significant. I do not say that I should be an unhappy choice, it is possible that I am more fitted to give happiness to a woman than those who take her more seriously."

"I do not speak of happiness," said Wehlitz in a dry, harsh voice. "I speak of development. She is not one of your happiness-mongers, this young girl."

"Ah, you take her, indeed, very seriously," said Lüdenstein. "And I have never taken a woman seriously. I do not even make your sentimental distinction—boy that you still are at heart—for woman as wife and mother. I have but one prejudice, if that can be called a prejudice which follows inevitably from my convictions; in a world such as this we live in,

a world for which I have, morally speaking, the most profound contempt, the propagation of life seems to me a grotesque and pitiable action. My own marriage, you will remember, has remained childless—and on this account there is an immense outcry and cackling among my wife's respectable relatives, who share your views as to woman's destiny, Ludwig!"

While Lüdenstein thus declared himself, Wehlitz had turned upon the sofa and fixed his eyes steadily upon him. His expression, as he did this, was singular. It was as though he forced himself to listen with a detachment as great as that with which the other spoke. After a moment's silence he observed: "I have always failed to understand how those could be the views of one who accepts my interpretation of life. That the reproduction of the slave-type should be severely restricted I have always insisted, and woe to the nation that does not come early enough to the realisation of that necessity! But that the proud, insatiable master-type should condemn itself to disappearance seems to me a madness, a degeneracy. At heart, Ernst, you are a pessimistic hedonist."

Lüdenstein shrugged his shoulders. "Fix your labels as you please, my friend. It is with your thought as destructive of illusions, with your poetical gift as creator of beauty, that I am in agreement. For your ethical system—for it is nothing else—I have no use. If I am of the proud and insatiable type, as you kindly suggest, I have no wish to hand on the species. I am sufficient to myself. I know none of your crav-

ings towards futurity." Lüdenstein rose, knocking out the ashes of his pipe against the stove.

"You fear life. That is it," said Wehlitz in a low voice. "You fear the future."

"Not at all," said Lüdenstein. "It should be put differently. I do not fear the present. I do not fear myself. I am contented to be an end to myself. But it grows late for metaphysical discussion and I see, moreover, that the Signorina endures my negations with impatience. Adieu. I will leave you to your romantic deliberations, only, if I may, I will venture to offer a word of counsel before I go." He paused, smiling not unkindly down upon them. Sachs was again busily drawing and did not lift his eyes. "It is this, that neither you nor Herr Sachs consider Fräulein Fennamy as a wife. She has great force, great charm; but she is not a home-builder; not the mother of a great race. She is, like so many of our modern women, an ineffectual artist. She has the artistic impulse without its capacity. And, with her, ambition takes the place of passion. She is of the ambiguous race of those who love imaginatively, intellectually, not physically; a dangerous type, cold, insatiable, devourers of men. Be careful, therefore; that is my very affectionate advice to you; be careful. Do not imagine that in Fräulein Fennamy you will find the gentle clay to mould upon the wheel of your desire. On the contrary, she may mould you. The Signorina will forgive me. I speak with scientific detachment." Slightly laughing, slightly shaking his

head, he thereupon bade them good-night and departed.

"Lüdenstein, with all his intelligence, is at times a dull animal," Wehlitz remarked after some silent moments had passed and in a voice that, for all his effort at control, trembled with intense vexation.

"I am glad that you can see and say it, Ludwig!" Eleanora exclaimed. "It is the *viveur's* standard he applies. Cold and insatiable! my Persis! my ardent spirit!"

"And what do you think of Lüdenstein's diagnosis, Conrad?" Wehlitz inquired, looking over at the young man who, his elbows now planted on the table, had ceased to draw. "Is there truth, do you think, in what he says of Fräulein Fennamy?"

"There is perhaps some truth," said Sachs, after a moment.

"What? You too, Conrad!" Wehlitz raised himself on his elbow. "Come, come! You think then that this young girl will try to devour us?"

"Devour us? No, I do not think that. No, certainly not!" said Sachs laughing.

"Well, then? What do you think? Explain yourself," said Wehlitz impatiently, frowning and beating down his cushions. "You speak always in jest. It becomes wearisome!"

"Ah, Ludwig!" Sachs cast a glance half grave, half comical upon his friend, "how should I say what I think. I do not know what I think, and I have none of Graf von Lüdenstein's fluency. He hates

women, or, no, it is truer to say that he despises them, and there is often much insight in contempt. On the other hand, in love there is even more. So, though there may be truth in what he says, it should not disturb you."

"I agree, I agree," Eleanora observed, the startled severity of the glance she had at first fixed upon him relaxing. "All of us poor humans are complicated creatures, deserving of both love and hate. That is all that you would say, is it not, Herr Sachs?"

"Yes, that is all," Sachs nodded. "And Graf von Lüdenstein is a clever man. I always feel that there is much truth in what he says, though so much that he says displeases me. It is true that young things are selfish; the self must at first absorb and interest us most. And the Fräulein is so young. Too young to understand herself. How, then, should we understand her? And since she is a woman she will tend to become what the man who loves her makes of her. Hein, signorina, is not my psychology profound?" He looked with his sad, merry eyes at Eleanora. "I ought to have been a novelist!"

Wehlitz had been listening with evident fretfulness. "There is a selfishness, young or old, which I admire and which I would encourage in Fräulein Fennamy," he said. "I do not fear her. I will mould her. I will make her think higher things of herself than she can dream."

Eleanora rose. It was getting late and this was a propitious note. She stooped over Wehlitz to press

his hand. "Well said, Ludwig; well said," she assured him. "Yours is the hand and brain she needs in order to find herself. And it is not to Graf von Lüdenstein that you must listen. It is to Herr Sachs."

The remark was unfortunate. Wehlitz replied with a more marked irritation. "I need listen to nobody. My own opinions are, in this as in all matters, enough to guide me."

Sachs had accompanied Signorina Zardo to the door and he went with her down the passage. She paused at the head of the stairs. "*Dio mio!* Herr Sachs," she murmured, "what possessed Ludwig to offer my proud young friend in marriage in this fashion! I cannot understand his state of mind."

Sachs, leaning on his crutch, looked at her mildly and shrewdly. "Can you not, signorina? It is not difficult to understand. It was a fanfaronade of Ludwig's; to prove to Graf von Lüdenstein his detachment. He is jealous of Graf von Lüdenstein. And also he wished to see what effect his proposals would have on him."

"You think our great Ludwig is so weak and foolish!" Eleanora said with some indignation.

"*Mein Gott,* signorina, have we not agreed that we all have our weaknesses!" said Sachs laughing.

Eleanora was silent for a moment, looking about the dimly lighted passage and down into the well of the staircase. A lazy porter yawned lengthily below. "Perhaps you are right," she observed at last. "Per-

haps you have seen clearly. It may have been jealousy."

"I am sure it was," smiled Sachs.

They heard now Wehlitz's fretful voice. "Conrad! Conrad! What are you doing?" it called from the salon. "I want you. You are not to leave me yet!"

"Good-night, signorina," said the young man. "Do not take Ludwig's fantastic behaviour too hardly. It means only kind and generous things, at bottom, like so many of Ludwig's fantasies. And the Fräulein will never hear of it."

"Let us hope not—let us hope not, indeed!" Eleanora ejaculated, descending.

CHAPTER VIII

PERSIS and Wehlitz were climbing among the vineyards to the beech-woods. They had left Tannenkreuz by the little bridge that crossed the docile river and taken this, the most direct path. The pine-clad summits lay on the left, dominating the tamer graces of the landscape with a touch of haughty romance. Wehlitz had asked her that morning—the third that they had spent under the apple-trees, and since the first he had come alone—if she would go with him to the beech-woods where there was a spot, much loved by him, that he would like to show her. Their first walk had been a purposeless progression, on and on and round and round the *Kur-Garten* and the river path, while they talked voraciously. Now they walked in silence and with a sense of intimacy that the impersonal and passionate discussions of the mornings had not brought.

The path among the vineyards was hot and stony. Persis carried her green sunshade and they paused often to look back over the town and river. It was Wehlitz who broke the silence.

"To-day we must talk of ourselves, Fräulein," he said, with the mingling of appeal and authority characteristic of his attitude towards the young girl.

"We know of each other already the essential; we know what each possesses of freedom and of force; but the history of the forces, their goal, and aim, is yet to be told."

From the green shadow cast by her sunshade Persis turned her calm regard upon him; calm and cool and grave, it was the gaze of a naiad, of a creature without a past or a future, and it seemed in the spirit of such a detachment that she said, after a moment, very slightly smiling: "I have had no history."

"No? A young lady who at ten wrote poetry and quoted Dante—Eleanora has told me much, you see—and who at sixteen wished to join the Nihilists?" He leaned to look into her face with the tender, rallying look she so often aroused.

"Is that history? Eleanora, then, can tell you all that there is to tell."

"Ah; not of the inner life and purpose. You will not make me believe that Eleanora has partaken of them. Devoted creature that she is, and full, too, of intelligence, she is not of your kind. She is not of the type that chooses, that rejects, that is ruled by itself—as you are."

Persis seemed to receive this as a contribution towards self-knowledge and to reflect upon it. "If I am like that," she said, "I am not aware of it. I am not conscious of an aim. All that I feel of myself is that I am waiting—can one wait with intensity?—Isn't it very young to be all interrogation, intense interrogation? I may have power, but nothing seems

yet to have been put into my hands. I am always surprised at the things that content other people."

He gazed at her for a moment without speaking. "I will put something into your hands," he said presently. "I will put a sword into your hands. My thought; it is a sword. And you, into my heart will put a song."

She was touched and elated. He was beautiful, she felt. And, as was usual with her when moved, she remained silent, looking away from him. They entered the beech-woods. "Tell me," Wehlitz went on presently—he had seen that he had pleased her and his face was full of happiness;—"tell me, shall we not drop the puerile conventions of that lesser world we both despise? They raise a barrier between us. May I not call you Persis? It is a beautiful name. It sounds like the name of a goddess whose forgotten shrine might stand in a lonely island of the Grecian archipelago."

"By all means call me Persis," she said smiling, for his pronunciation, like Eleanora's, gave the word Latin vowels and consonants. "In its original English it would not, I think, suggest poetical analogies. My mother, you know, calls it Pursiss."

"Ah, even so it is full of grace—full of grace and strangeness; of leaves that whisper, rivulets that sing. And you will call me Ludwig?"

"Your name makes me think of knights and anchorites," said Persis. "Yes, indeed, I will call you Ludwig."

"Of knights and anchorites?" His delight was apparent, a boyish, almost a childish delight. "But that is apt, singularly apt. On my mother's side I am, as you may have heard, of an ancient and chivalrous family. And my life is the austere life of thought, a dedicated life, the anchorite's. Yes, it is well found. You too," he smiled, "have—you need not tell me so, for it is apparent—strains of a noble blood in you."

"I don't think so," said Persis. She was looking about her now, at the woods, the fan-like branches of the beeches spreading horizontal webs of green, the dense, soft brown of fallen leaves, the chinks and spaces of summer sky above. She listened to him, but her thoughts were tangled in the green and light, fluttering like birds from branch to branch; this vagrancy of attention was frequent with her.

"Ah, but it is again Eleanora who supplies me with my background: your father was a remarkable man, a soldier, I think, a man of war. And, I think, of an old Irish family."

"No; he was a newspaper editor in a little American town," said Persis. "Perhaps you are thinking of mamma's father. He was killed in the Civil War."

"As I said. A martial blood beats in your veins, the blood of conquerors."

His persistence caught back her attention to him. She looked round at him with a mild amusement. "You would hardly say so if you could see the daguerreotype mamma has of her father; a kindly, insignificant creature, more like a sheep than a soldier. The

Civil War, you see," she enlightened him, "drove so many unlikely types into the struggle. My grandfather was not a soldier, though he died in battle."

Wehlitz would not relinquish some part, at least, of his myth. "A heroic struggle; I have read of it; heroic in defeat; a struggle for the ideal of aristocracy. Slaves indeed should do your bidding."

A slight but definite irony edged her smile. "But we were Northerners I am glad to say. As far as I know anything about it, my prejudices, and certainly all my traditions, are on the Northern side. I should have hated to have slaves. It is a repellent relationship, I think."

Wehlitz had flushed. "You marshal your facts as if to prove to me with them that you are not, what your very independence of them proves that you are—an aristocrat to the bone."

"I certainly don't feel that I need conquering ancestors to give me independence," she returned.

"Ah, but it is there that you are wrong; we owe them everything, our ancestors. Without their pride and prowess we should be the slaves and not the masters. All that is of value is inheritance. The efforts of the small and weak to raise themselves only result in ugliness and deformity."

"Ah, well, the wish to rise, the effort, shows that the man cannot be entirely weak and small. And some one must have begun. But I think you would have been interested in my father," she went on, aware that he was embarrassed by the fear of having offended her

and feeling very kindly towards him. "I must show you the photographs we have of him. Yes, he was Irish, but not of a great family. He was the son of an Irish country doctor and he ran away from home when his mother died. He was a rebellious creature, and full of gaiety and scorn; one sees it in his face."

"As in yours; as in yours; yes; you shall not make nothing of my convictions!" Wehlitz cried, with quickly recovered radiance. "See; this is the spot I wished to find. Is it not peaceful? Shall we rest here—and tell each other of our lives?"

"You shall tell me of yours, since you are old enough to have had a history," said Persis.

They had come from the woods into a green nook, open to the sky and divided on one hand from fields of tall grain by a grassy bank and a row of pastoral trees. Persis sat down on the grass and Wehlitz, taking off his hat, stretched himself beside her and leaned his head on his hand. He was happy once more and did not need to be asked again for his story. He longed to pour it out, to gain her sympathy and understanding; she did not need to gain his; she felt this, and that his curiosity in regard to her was more than satisfied by her presence there beside him. She more than answered for herself.

A series of pictures rose before Persis while he spoke. He told her all, from the very beginning: the strange little boy, formal, sensitive, full of pride and generosity: the quaint German town; the sober tender-hearted customs; the traditions of duty, and re-

sponsibility; and, over all, as in an old German child's picture-book, the clustered bells of the happy simple faith. After that came the pictures of youth and storm, of the bankruptcy of belief, and of manhood with its scholastic triumphs and ardent friendships. Her clear, if untrained mind followed, without the aid of images, the growth of his inexorable thought as he told her of it, spreading chasms around him that those he loved could not cross. To bear witness to his light had been to sever all the ties, once so dear, and to drive himself naked and bleeding into the wilderness. For years he had wandered there, looking down upon a fen of baseness where men, refusing to listen to his drastic creed, battened upon illusions and clung together for warmth and safety.

Wehlitz's face had grown sombre while he spoke. Half turned from her he looked down, plucking at the tall grasses under his hand. The muscle twitched in his cheek and his voice dropped to long silences. Once he brushed angrily at his eyes and she saw that his tears had risen. "And now," he said, the story having reached its end, "I am alone. The few whom I thought I might still count as friends did not deign to acknowledge my 'Mountain Cry.' It enraged and terrified them. They hide from me. I take from them all the props they live by. I leave them only what they have of native strength; it is not to be wondered at, perhaps, that they hate and fear me!—the cravens!"

He had, she saw it clearly, almost forgotten her.

His voice was fierce and moody. Almost two hours had passed while he told his story and the afternoon sun slanted over the bank casting long shadows from the trees above them. Persis, suddenly, felt that she was tired. "You have still Graf von Lüdenstein and Herr Sachs?" she questioned. She would be too late for tea, she was thinking. Also she watched a little bird that fluttered, with bright glimmers of the wings, from branch to branch among the lower bushes at the wood-edge—a chaffinch. She wondered if Wehlitz was fond of birds. She had almost added the question to her first one, but checked it.

He plucked at the grass, knitting his brows. "Yes, yes, yes, I have them." He spoke rather fretfully; how completely, indeed, he had forgotten her. "But they are not such disciples as I seek. Lüdenstein and I have, at bottom, little in common; his is an indolent, if brilliant mind; it is pleasure he seeks, not joy, and joy, tragic joy, is the climax of my initiation. Lüdenstein is not capable of tragedy or of joy. His is the cynical smile of the worldling, not the brave, god-like laughter. Still, yes, after a fashion I believe that Ernst is devoted enough. The recondite pleases his æsthetic sense and he gains lustre in his own eyes from his association with me."

"And Herr Sachs?"

Wehlitz's face involuntarily softened. "Yes. Sachs indeed is my friend, my dear friend, devoted, loyal. But our minds do not meet, not at all. He calls the empty sky upon which we evoke our visions,

God, and the fen-parasites his brothers, and says that each of them may see the sky. Poor Conrad! Yet not a hypocrite,—a sincere self-deceiver. He limps along, mentally and physically, and makes a creed from incompatibles—like his Hegel, the web-spinner. And frank, he has been frank. He does not try to deceive me with compromises. From the first, when I led him to my icy mountain top, he said, 'No, here we part.' I do not blame him."

"He lives with you?" Still she watched the bird and her thoughts were as much with it as with Wehlitz.

"Lives with me? Perhaps we may say so. Since a year ago, one may call it that. It was a time of great distress for me. I was ill, gravely ill, haunted, pursued. Conrad came to me, left his work, his life—and came. He shall not lose, no, I shall see to it that he does not lose, and he carries on his work now quite happily. He too, writes and says that he is glad of the leisure his companionship to me permits him. Yes, he writes: webs—webs—webs—to entangle the feet of other cripples. Well—let them swing merrily in the sunshine! One does not grudge to cripples their alleviations! But for Conrad's thought—it is not to be taken seriously. I do not consider it. It does not count with me at all."

"His voice is a much pleasanter voice than Graf von Lüdenstein's," said Persis absently. "I have not looked carefully at him yet, but I think that with all his ugliness his face pleases me the most."

"Ah. It does?" Wehlitz at last looked up at her,

and with a new vividness. "And me, too, it pleases more. Yet Ernst is a fine looking man, do you not find?"

Persis was laughing a little, her limpid yet mirthless laughter. "Is he? Do you know what mamma says about him, that his hips are too fat. It does strike one, you know."

Wehlitz loudly laughed, drawing himself upright. "Good. Yes. Good. I am glad that as to Lüdenstein you feel with me." He was looking at the young girl almost merrily and as if at last he saw her again. "You are pale, Persis," he went on. "I have talked and talked and perhaps wearied you."

"No. I am glad to have heard your history. It makes me understand you better. You have been very brave."

"Brave, yes, I have been brave," said Wehlitz with a deep sigh, "but at times weary, weary beyond words." He extended himself again in the grass. "Ah—it is good to lie here and to tell it all to you, who understand. How deep is the trust I feel in you, Persis. Brave and weary, so it goes, the pulse, the pulse of life, the effort, and then the swoon when life seems to ebb away." He had closed his eyes.

"That is like a poem I wrote once," said Persis presently. "How little I thought that I was to meet anyone like you when I wrote it. I think that I have felt brave and weary, too, though I am so young."

He sat up at once, with widely open eyes. "A poem? Eleanora has told me of your poems. What

is this poem? Our poem—for, yes, our hearts beat as one—have I not felt it from the first? Say it to me."

"It was about a flying bird that I had watched. I am very fond of watching birds. Are you? Even the sparrows in towns I like to watch."

"No, I have not watched them. You must teach me to watch them with you."

"You know, when they fly. Does it not make you feel an almost unendurable gladness for them?"

"No; I have not felt it; I have not thought of it. But say the poem. Let me hear it," he cried vehemently, gazing intently at her.

Persis sat above him looking down at him, her hands folded on her knees, and in her cool, monotonous voice, that yet lent to the words a curious magic, she repeated:

Beating wings, soaring wings, wings of joy—
Pulsing wings—you are like my heart in its sorrow;
It beats in hope and it pauses for sorrow to soar;
It beats like your wings—like your wings against the sky;
But the pulse of its hope is pain and its pause is sorrow.
It beats in darkness; but you fly over the sun.
It strives in silence; but the music of earth mounts to you.
It pauses in wonder; but you are glad without thought.

My heart and life are like the beating of wings;
Ever not yet; ever to pause and go;
Ever to strive and float and desire and dream,—
And a dream is the pause and a joy is the pulse into pain.

Pause, oh life, too long, and you pass away,
Your dream to nothingness fades, you faint from the sun;
—Like the dew in the sun your dream and your pain are over
As a bird too long outstretched on its joy would fall to the ground.

After she had finished, Wehlitz sat looking at her in silence. Then his eyes filled with tears. "But you have said it all, wonderful child," he murmured.

"No, not all—it was a mood," said Persis. "Life itself is more like the bird, I think, with more joy in the flight."

"Yes, yes," he said slowly, looking at her. "Life is joy, its pain and horror are joy, and to pause too long is to fall to nothingness; for beyond our flight there is nothing. You see it all, all is there in your poem. The rapture of impulse and creation and the dark pause of contemplation where life knows itself and the emptiness in which it hovers. Were we not destined to meet, Persis? You seem to me to be my other self: the very spirit of my dreams."

His deep emotion stirred an answering emotion in her. Tenderness made part of it, but deeper than tenderness was the delight she felt in his delight. His delight in her was a halo cast around him. She stood bathed in its radiance and she felt no need to draw nearer to the man who cast it. "I think that it is you I was waiting for," she said gravely. "I think that you will make me fly."

"We will fly—fly—fly together," said Wehlitz. "And I will arm you with my thoughts and you will

wreathe your thoughts for me. Ah, beautiful child, are you indeed to be my perfect friend?" He had put out his hand and laid it on hers.

She was a little troubled. She believed herself quite capable of being a perfect friend, yet she was not prepared for the profound trust and tenderness expressed in his gaze and gesture. She pressed his hand and rose. "I think that I can be a perfect friend," she said.

The vineyards on the hill-side lay in shadow, and when they had crossed the bridge and entered Tannenkreuz the sun had set. Persis walked in a happy mood. The sense of power he gave her was like a translucent lake in which she could dive and float and swim. She was too tired, now, to wish to swim; she lay buoyantly supported by the magical water and it stretched, shining, all about her and far, far away to the horizons of her life. Above it birds, their birds, soared and floated and vague rhythms wreathed themselves in her mind. They came to the pension gates. Wehlitz broke the silence.

"It is as if we had gone on a long journey, you and I, Persis, is it not? And it is only the first of many."

"We can hardly, at any time, make a longer one, can we?" said Persis.

They stood there in the twilight at the gate, under the ranged poplars of the street, and she was aware—it was like waking from a dream to become aware of it—that they were probably visible to her mother

from the sitting-room window. The thought came with the discomfort that so often attends waking. She hoped that he would go now and not try and keep her there. She was so very sleepy.

"No," Wehlitz was saying, "not longer flights, for that could scarcely be. Sky and abyss, we have to-day traversed them both. But there are many paths through the sky, through the abyss; we are to traverse them all together."

"I am ready."

He looked at her. His hand held the gate-post. "I wish always to be with you."

His gaze was grave, tremulous, beautiful. She felt it so; again he moved her, almost with a sense of pity; and how discordant it was that at such a moment the thought of her mother's quiet, unsparing vision should bring incongruous analogies. Why should he remind her suddenly of a little chemist from whom she had bought toilet vinegar one day in a steep, hot Italian street? He had had a large, high brow, aggressively and foolishly expansive, and a great moustache overwhelming a chin the more futile for its veiling, and as he tied up the toilet vinegar he had looked at her with fierce, foolish, romantic eyes. How hateful of her to have remembered him! It was her mother's thought and she tried to call it back, but still it lingered on Wehlitz, remarking that his trousers were overlarge and that stood with a trained, habitual tension that had no military ease. She cut short the unworthy moment, holding out her hand. "Yes, we must never

part, we are always to be comrades. I feel it. Now I must leave you."

He held her hand. "I am to come again to-morrow? To-morrow morning?"

"Of course. We have our lesson to-morrow. In the garden, as usual."

"And will you walk with me again to-morrow afternoon? Or drive with me? to the vineyards? It is a beautiful drive. And I have so much to say to you."

"Let us drive, then, in a few days from now—as a reward for hard work in our mornings."

"Ah, the wise child! Already she has mastered the discipline and the austerity that true life requires. I am to wait, then, for my reward."

All this time he had held her hand. She felt an irritation, and, unusual self-conquest in her, summoned a smile to hide it. "We are both to wait. Good-bye, then."

"At ten to-morrow?"

"At ten." She stepped inside the gate and closed it, and he turned away at last, looking back at her as he doffed his hat.

In the passage, when she had entered the pension, old Lady Frere met her and looked at her with sleepy disapprobation.

Mrs. Fennamy, in their sitting-room, made no pretence of not having witnessed the long-drawn parting. It was one of the most comfortable things about her that, tactful to the bone as her daughter had al-

ways found her, she never affected tact. And now, turning from the window, she did not pretend to conceal her surprise. "You have had an afternoon of it!" she said. "It 's almost seven!"

"We have not been far," said Persis, "only up to the woods, where we have been sitting. But, yes we have been talking for hours. Herr Wehlitz has been talking, rather."

"I should think it would wear him out, the way he talks," said Mrs. Fennamy, pushing aside her work for the lamp, which the maid brought in, "and you look pretty tired."

Persis owned that she was tired.

CHAPTER IX

WEHLITZ, however, did not appear at the appointed hour next morning. It was little Herr Sachs who, alone, at ten o'clock came tapping down the street. A fine rain was falling; so that Persis had put her books in readiness in the sitting-room; and from the window she watched the young man approach, with some wonder and with some chagrin. She had completely recovered from her fatigue and was eager for fresh flights.

Herr Sachs entered shyly and awkwardly. He did not know what to do with his hat; or with his hands; and after seating himself at her bidding, he shuffled his feet about and told her that Wehlitz was not well. He had sat up till late the night before composing; yes, he sometimes composed music; did the Fräulein not know? And this was for her; Ludwig had written it for her. Sachs held out to her the long roll of MS. he had brought with him, "And he asks that you will play it through so that I may tell him if you like it."

Persis unrolled the music. At the head of the first page stood "Flight of the Bird." She was pleased; touched; and the colour rose to her cheeks.

"But is he ill?" she asked, after looking in silence

for some moments through the tribute thus laid before her, and glancing down at the little cripple who, on the edge of his chair, turned his hat round and round. "Or is it over-fatigue? I was afraid yesterday that he was very tired."

"Yes, he was tired; and it was also the late hour last night, Fräulein. He sat till twelve at his piano, and then would not be satisfied until all was written out. It was three before he went to bed. This morning he woke with a bad headache. He often has these neuralgic headaches, and he cannot use his eyes next day. They affect his eyesight."

"I am so sorry," Persis murmured, moving to the piano; but she was not thinking of Wehlitz's indisposition; she was absorbed in the thought of the tribute. She sat down and played.

The piece was very difficult, written with a curious, complicated vigour; but she read with facility, and on a second playing the music was all revealed. The expression was inadequate to the intention. She recognized the intention—tragic joy, tragic freedom, poised on nothingness. The music escaped pedantry through its vehemence, but it did not achieve beauty. A painful simile came to her of a bird shot, and falling with abrupt, desperate strokes of the wings. Her own conception seemed blurred by this interpretation of it and for some moments after she had finished she sat rather disappointedly glancing over the pages, forgetting the young man who sat behind her. Then, remembering, she turned to look at him.

She had not really looked at Herr Sachs before. He had emerged from his embarrassment while she played, and now, as his eyes met hers, the ugliness and oddity of his face stamped itself upon her mind. It made her think, freakishly, of a wooden trencher, broad, clumsy, plebeian, and carved with quaint Germanic antiquities; or of the fiddler's face in some old carousing picture; or else—and the analogy came as easily—of the devout face of a burgher donor in a Memling triptych, kneeling in the corner, and looking up, with hands folded, at the enthroned Madonna. Very singularly ugly it was, with its stiff ungainly hair, spatulate nose, large mouth awry and small eyes that twinkled—was it in mirth or in pain?—or that became fixed, clear, observant as now; eyes sunken between lids slightly swollen and suggesting sleeplessness or tears. While she thus looked at him these eyes had become questioning, and they brought her mind back to the music and its composer. "I only wish that Ludwig had not made himself ill in writing it," she said.

"He felt that he must put it down while it was so strongly in his mind, Fräulein. I may tell him that you are pleased with it?"

She hesitated for a moment. "I must tell him myself," she then found. "I shall come this afternoon with mamma and see him."

"Ah, he will be very happy to hear that," said Herr Sachs. "It will be the best of medicines for him. And he asked, Fräulein, if it will not be too much

trouble for you, that you, in return for his music, should write out your poem for him."

"Write it out?" Persis smiled. "Certainly I will write it—and bring it to him."

"No, no;" Herr Sachs smiled back, encouraged, evidently, by her kindness. "If I may say so—it will give Ludwig more pleasure to have it now; there are many hours to pass before the afternoon and he can read your poem over. He is waiting for it. And he promised me," the young man added, "that if you were willing, I should see it too. You will allow that, Fräulein? I have heard the music, you know."

"But, of course, I allow it," Persis said, still smiling and pleased with Herr Sachs. "It will not bear much reading, I warn you. My poems, if you can call them that, are really improvisations, to be recited—and then forgotten. But, of course, if you would like to see it——"

She drew the ink-stand towards her and took up a pen.

She had but just finished writing when the door bell sounded again, and the round-cheeked little servant, wiping her arms on her blue apron, ushered in Graf von Lüdenstein.

Large, blond, well-dressed, exhaling a fragrance of good tobacco and eau-de-Cologne, he stood there smiling, hat and stick in hand, his eyes fixed on Persis who, looking up from her paper, hesitated in a moment of surprise before rising to meet him.

"At last I find you, Fräulein," he said. "I have been wondering when I should see you again, since Ludwig has banished me from the metaphysical symposiums."

"Did Ludwig banish you?" Persis asked. "Lessons are better, it is true, in *tête-à-tête*. They are lessons, not symposiums now, you know."

"Yes; he has banished us, both of us, has he not, Sachs?—And he was right and you are right; everything is better in *tête-à-tête*—except the things that bore us; they, by diffusion, become less wearisome. Ah, you are a musician, Fräulein? I did not know that. What have we here?" He leaned down to peer with short-sighted eyes at the music. "'Flight of the Bird.' Is it your inspiration?"

"Herr Wehlitz sent it to me," said Persis. Graf von Lüdenstein made her feel vaguely shy, or, rather, vaguely at a loss. "It is very interesting."

"Oh! One of Ludwig's compositions. Yes; I see now that it is his hand. Interesting? They are sometimes that; seldom more. You permit, Fräulein? I, also, am passionately devoted to music." He had laid his hat on the piano, his stick and gloves beside it, and seating himself ran his thick, white hands with a masterly competence over the keys.

Persis had flushed a little and, as Lüdenstein thus took possession of Ludwig's tribute to her, she glanced over at Herr Sachs, whose eyes, she thought, met hers gravely. Her poem was lying in full view on the table and folding the paper she handed it to him with

a certain answering gravity that would convey to him her discrimination; Graf von Lüdenstein might take possession of the tribute; he should not see what had inspired it. Sachs bowed his head as he took the paper from her and put it carefully in his coat pocket.

Persis now could listen to Graf von Lüdenstein. He was playing with splendour, a splendour that emphasized the inadequacy of Ludwig's composition. When he had finished he turned on the stool and looked smiling at Persis. "You find it interesting? No. It is not good. It is from friendship you speak."

"Not at all," said Persis, with some haughtiness of mien. "I find it very interesting."

"So; 'Flight of the Bird'"; Lüdenstein looked back at the music; "not for one yard does the bird fly. It is strange, Ludwig being such a rebel, that his music should be so unoriginal and platitudinous; and thin; and laboured." He struck out a phrase here and there.

"I would rather you did not dissect it," said Persis. She rose and gave effect to her wish by lifting the music from the rack. Lüdenstein's glance expressed amusement and admiration.

"You are a devoted friend, Fräulein Fennamy. That is well; very well; I, too, am a devoted friend and, if not so prejudiced, I can yet be glad to see that you are so. I may not, then, play Ludwig to you; but may I play something else—something that

we both find interesting. For you are, I feel sure, fond of music."

His unruffled composure made her feel a little ridiculous. Murmuring that it would be delightful to hear him, she took her seat again, holding Ludwig's recovered composition. And looking across at Herr Sachs, so still, so silent, in his chair, she was restored; for she saw that he was pleased that she should have rescued Ludwig.

But now she must listen as she had not listened before. Lüdenstein was playing a Brahms *Rhapsodie* and it was long since she had heard such music. It mounted in her like a rising fountain of exquisite expectancy; it brimmed her with delight and waves of blissful sadness broke over her. She was bathed, possessed by the magic that eluded her and saw it as an Eros, bending to his Psyche in the darkness, splendid and invisible. Under the happy tumult of her obliterated yet heightened self, words and rhythms wreathed themselves.

Lüdenstein, when he turned to her, found an unseeing gaze dwelling upon him and he was aware of the presence of creative power in the young girl, the artist's mastery of what has mastered him.

She hardly smiled her thanks, sitting there in the attitude habitual to her, with folded arms and head a little bent so that her pale, cold eyes looked up from under brooding brows. He examined her, almost with an impersonal interest. "I see that you are one of those who care for music," he said.

Persis emerged from her visions to consciousness of their evoker. She could not see Graf von Lüdenstein again with quite such alien eyes.

"Yes; I care very much for it," she said. "I hardly play at all myself. I studied very assiduously at one time but I found that to do what I should wish to do would take too much of my life. And I could find what I wanted in other people's playing; in playing like yours. Will you come and play to me sometimes?"

"As often as you will let me—as often as you will let me," said Lüdenstein.

It was as if they had forgotten Herr Sachs. He rose now from his chair. "I am to tell Ludwig that you will come at four, Fräulein?"

She was sorry that he was going. She felt that she would like him to sit there, while Graf von Lüdenstein played to them, for hours. "Must you go?" she said; "yes; I will come at four."

"I must go; I thank you, Fräulein. I promised Ludwig to be back."

"That is a singular little personage," said Lüdenstein when Sachs had gone and they had heard the front door close upon him. Leaving the piano as he spoke he came and leaned against the mantelshelf, looking down at her.

"Yes," said Persis rather absently. "He has a wonderful devotion to Herr Wehlitz."

"Wonderful? I do not know about that. We are all devoted to Ludwig, are we not? those of us

whom he does not strike from him. There are few of us left, I confess."

"One can't imagine anyone wishing to strike Herr Sachs away."

"One cannot imagine it and it may, indeed, not befall him. He is safer in being outside the circle of intellectual interests. He fills the post of court dwarf and jester, one of the misshapen creatures, merry, sagacious and melancholy, whom we read of in Shakespeare or see on a Velasquez canvas; licensed clowns who contrive to amuse their masters while instilling sometimes a wisdom that equals would not dare impart. Liberties are allowable from those beneath us. You are reading much of our Ludwig, Fräulein?"

"Yes; a great deal; the earlier books. What I most want to read is the prose poem. It is to come out very soon now, he says."

"A very great poet, our Ludwig, and poet rather than thinker. That is his tragedy; he can infect, he cannot prove; and he wishes to prove."

"I shall understand him, I think," said Persis. She sat beneath Graf von Lüdenstein on her sofa and she had, while they talked, a very singular feeling. The meaning between them was not the meaning of their words. It was embodied in the large, blond presence of the man who stood at the mantelpiece looking down at her. He was full of some ambiguous power and she felt in herself an answering and resistent power and rejoiced, though with a sort of fear, in her awareness of him. It made her think of a time at

Scheveningen when she had bathed in a stormy sea, diving with dread delight, through each great foaming breaker as it advanced and swimming, in an ecstasy of insecurity, towards the next. How frightened her mother had been!—standing calling on the beach, her words blown away like bubbles by the gale. She did not like Graf von Lüdenstein, yet she rejoiced in his presence; and in the long silence that now grew—it was in the silences that the meaning towered—she saw the immense breaker advancing, its translucent wall rising between her and the sky, laced with ribbons of foam. Meeting his eyes calmly she felt that she struck into it, passed through it, and emerged, smiling, triumphant.

"You are fond of understanding people," Lüdenstein remarked after this potent silence. "I see that. And yes, you will understand Ludwig soon; better than he understands himself. And let me give you a word of friendly warning, Fräulein—it is for his sake that I venture on it—do not, when you understand him, let him see that you do so. His is the child's instinctive genius with the man's brain; but he has also the child's susceptibility to criticism. So be a true friend to Ludwig and do not let him quarrel with you."

"Do you never let him see that you understand him?" she asked.

"Never. When he deceives himself I keep silence. When I do not agree I keep silence; an acquiescent and not a provocative silence."

"You seem to value his friendship more than your own integrity," she observed dryly.

Lüdenstein smiled. "My integrity, my dear young lady, rests on the foundation of my own tastes and wishes, and on no small moral formulas. I am, in this, of Ludwig's way of thinking. You will find indeed, that I am Ludwig's sole disciple and that I practise what he only preaches. I am fond of Ludwig. I find him of value. I guard him from himself, lest a valuable and fragile object should be broken, and this, often, can be secured only by sacrificing strict veracity. I advise you to imitate me."

"I do not know that I should care to take so much trouble. My wish and taste is for veracity."

"What? You have, then, no affection for Ludwig? Do not think that you can change him. You will only break and bruise him if you do not indulgently adapt the truth to him."

"Certainly I have affection for him." He was confusing her a little.

"It is more trouble, then, let me assure you, to quarrel with those we care for than to indulge them."

"You do not convince me that I shall have to choose between your alternatives."

"Ah; you are a remarkable young woman, you would say, and it is true that you may be able to keep Ludwig's friendship on your own terms. But if you succeed in that you will be the first of his friends who has done so. With all my heart I wish you success." They spoke of Ludwig and of her friendship

for Ludwig; but it was not of Ludwig that his eyes spoke to her, as, intent and sleepy, they rested upon her with the force of a physical weight.

On her sofa, her attitude unchanged, she looked up at him from under her bent brows and slightly smiled, testing in the smile her own resisting strength. "It is very kind of you," she said, with a faint yet quite perceptible mockery. "Why are you so solicitous on my account, may I ask?"

"Ah, my kindness is for Ludwig—not for you, Fräulein," said Lüdenstein laughing. "I have no kindness for you."

This was indeed, an unexpected whirl of the waters. She felt herself striking out blindly and knew that she showed the discomfiture of a child rebuked. "I thought you had," she heard herself saying, lamely, and she hated herself and him for her helplessness.

"Not at all," Lüdenstein continued to laugh. "It is all for Ludwig, my kindness. I am Ludwig's friend, not yours. I do not wish to be your friend."

She knew that the colour had rushed to her cheeks. She dropped her eyes and felt the tears of anger and embarrassment brim them, while he stood there leisurely watchful of her awkwardness. But when he spoke again it was with a change of tone that made her look quickly up at him.

"No," he said, and his eyes, meeting hers, narrowed themselves as he watched the effect of his words upon her. "No; I hope for something more interesting than friendship with you, Fräulein. Antagonism

and curiosity and delight are too strongly present between a man and woman, when one is young and beautiful and the other neither a dreamer nor a child, for anything like friendship to be in question. Be friends, good friends with Ludwig; that is what I ask of you. But with me I hope that you will often quarrel, and as far as it lies with me I promise you that our quarrels will never part us."

Through this speech, made with the greatest deliberation, she kept her eyes fixed on him, but she knew that the waters had indeed closed over her head. She heard herself saying at last—she feared it was ridiculously—"Oh thank you—but I have no intention of quarrelling with you—at any time. I don't care for quarrels—except with friends."

"Perhaps this is our first," Lüdenstein suggested, smiling upon her almost paternally.

She had risen and stood, her eyes dwelling on him, not shy and not indignant—it was only astonishment she could feel as yet and a deep uncertainty as to his meaning.

"Is Madame Fennamy in, Fräulein?" he now continued. "I hope that I may see her also. I shall be very glad to pay her my respects."

"Yes; she is in," said Persis. Was he releasing her after his experiments? Had he been teasing her? Was it possible that he was trying to make love to her? "I will ask her if she can see you," she said. She hoped that her swift retreat had not the appearance of flight.

Indignation came fully as she mounted the stairs to her mother's room, but an impulse of secrecy came with it and—what were the words he had used?—antagonism—curiosity—delight. She did not fear him. She had been confused, that was true, and disconcerted; but she did not fear him and, if he were an unprincipled man, she would show him that she was not the silly child he took her for. "Mamma," she said, entering her mother's room, "Graf von Lüdenstein is downstairs and hopes to see you. I have my work to do this morning, for Ludwig, will you tell him so? so that I cannot give him more of my time."

CHAPTER X

MRS. FENNAMY, when she and Persis met at luncheon, made no comment upon her visitor. It was as they were walking that afternoon to Wehlitz's hotel that she remarked: "I don't like Graf von Lüdenstein, Persis, one bit; do you?"

"I can't say that I like him," said Persis. "But he is an interesting man."

"Is he interesting? He is clever, I suppose, but not as clever as he thinks. It is n't clever to think other people are more stupid than they are. He was very polite this morning, but I saw perfectly well that he was laughing at me all the time and he thought I did n't see it. And he has a way of looking at you as if you had a smut on your nose but he was n't going to embarrass you by telling you so. I hope he 's not coming often."

"Well, as to often, I should n't care for that," said Persis. "But he plays exceedingly well and I shall enjoy hearing his music from time to time." Her mother's shrewdness amused her and, having by now completely recovered her poise, she could feel how immature beside herself this unsuspecting mother was. With all her knowledge of the depravities of the Europe where she had spent so many years, she was still

at heart, if not as ignorant, yet quite as guileless as when she had left Ashleyville. Queer experiences might befall the queer people one met or the still queerer people of whom one read in novels; but that her own daughter should find herself in the midst of such a one, neither accepting nor avoiding it, scrutinizing it, rather, with an intellectual enjoyment, was not a supposition that could, so Persis conceived, cross her orderly little mind.

Herr Wehlitz's hotel was a small cheerful place with terraces about it on which, under awnings, tables were set out and bay-trees stood ranged in tubs.

They were met in the hall by Eleanora who, evidently, had been watching for them from the window. "Ah!—this will be the medicine he needs!" she exclaimed. "He has been so ill!—in such blinding pain, my poor Ludwig! And already he was beginning to toss and stare at the clock and to mutter that you were late!—This way, Annetta, this way, my child."

"But we are not late," Persis observed. "The clock, you hear, is just striking the hour."

"Ah—it has been no ordinary impatience that has awaited you," Eleanora murmured as she led them upstairs and along the passage to Wehlitz's sitting-room.

He lay on the sofa, and his eyes, as they entered, seized upon Persis. "You have come," he exclaimed.

He greeted Mrs. Fennamy, even at this moment

his punctilious courtesy not failing him; then, taking Persis by the hand, he drew her to a seat beside him and gazed at her with feverish exaltation.

Persis was taken aback by the fervour of her reception. Their intimacy seemed to have made immense strides since yesterday. Herr Sachs was in the room, but Wehlitz had so taken possession of her that she could only cast a glance of greeting upon the young man and observe that Eleanora had drawn her mother, with him, to the window and had engaged them in an animated conversation.

"Tell me," Wehlitz said, clasping his hands behind his head and looking at her with bright, joyous eyes, "you cared for my music? Much? Conrad said that you yourself would tell me how much. He told you that my night had been passed with it. It was the dedication of our union."

She was already accustomed to feeling that he at once touched and amused her. His gaze so much touched her now that she felt it true to say: "It told me everything you wished it to tell me. It was the most beautiful present I ever had."

"Ah, I knew—I knew that you cared for music. We could not be apart in that. Not that I mislead myself, Persis. I am not a great musician, though I had dreams of that flight. Yet great ones have cared for my works."

"I must hear them all some day."

"Soon, yes, soon. And there are to be so many days for us."

"Are you here for long," she asked, a little—and not for the first time—at a loss.

His eyes dwelt on her. "You ask? I am here for as long as you are."

"We had thought of passing the winter in Paris."

"In Paris. It is well."

She looked at him in perplexity. Did he intend to follow them to Paris? Wehlitz turned from the question of these practical adjustments. "And your poem, Persis," he said, "and written in your beautiful hand—a hand that floats and soars with your thought. I have wept over it. Conrad, too, has seen it; but he is a sorry fellow, our Conrad; he would not take it seriously. He rallied me when I wept."

"Would not take it seriously?" Persis repeated with some austerity. The young man sat near the window listening to the talk of the two ladies in an attitude of attention, a hand upon each knee. His eyes turned now on Persis and his friend, and it was evident that he had heard her exclamation.

"Ah, he saw its beauty; but he could not understand that a soul could be at once so young and so profound. He does not understand that a young soul may taste in presage and through intuition all the tragedy of life. No, no, he laughed at me and said that as a pretty young lady you had no right to make such poems. He spoke of you as if you had been a canary in its golden cage. Aha! You hear us, Conrad. Well, is it not true what I say?"

Herr Sachs was looking extremely discomposed, and

Wehlitz, whose eyes had followed Persis's, watched him with an expression half resentful and half affectionately malicious. "Aha!" he said, shaking a forefinger at him, "see him change colour! Do you dare to look the young falcon in the eye, you jackanapes, and talk to her of canaries?"

Very red indeed, Herr Sachs stumbled up out of his chair and came to stand before them, leaning there on his crutch and turning his eyes from one to the other. "It is you who are the jackanapes, Ludwig," he retorted, and though not ill-temperedly it was with a certain vehemence. "I have said nothing of canaries."

"Aha!" Wehlitz repeated, laughing like a malicious boy, "he is dumb-founded, our Conrad. You said nothing of canaries? Very well. But who was it, then, who spoke of *Schwärmerei*—of the *Schwärmerei* of the young heart, ignorant of itself and of life. Yes! it is well that he should be betrayed to the falcon! such irreverence deserves its punishment!"

But Persis was examining the young man with more curiosity than displeasure. "Do you think, then, that because one is young all that one feels of suffering is self-deception and froth?" she inquired while Wehlitz, intently watching her, took an evident delight in the high serenity of the gaze she lifted to the young man.

"Oh, no, oh no! Fräulein, I did not mean that," Sachs stammered, smiling at her, however, with the recovery of composure that seemed to come quickly

to his rescue. "And let me assure you that no thought of canaries could have entered my mind.—*Du böser Kerl!*" he cast at Wehlitz. "It was in no sense your poem that I criticised, for I, too, thought it very deeply true; all that I said to Ludwig was that he must not read a real sorrow into your words, for though the young can suffer very keenly, it may also be that they are intoxicated with the mere imagination of sorrow; is it not so, Fräulein? You must know it too, how one reads and reads, and dreams and dreams, and fills one's heart and brain with visions; and for the young there is pleasure, deep pleasure, in the sadness and the tears. Do I not know it?" Sachs added with his infectious grimace. "Have I not spent many nights gazing at the moon while the tear dripped down!"

Persis was not able to restrain a smile. "You impute to me an experience I have not shared," she observed, and her demeanour was that of the young queen who bandies deep themes playfully with a favoured jester. "There are no tears in my poem. I have never looked at the moon while the tears dripped down. I do not, indeed, remember ever having cried in all my life."

"*Mein Gott,* Fräulein! what are you saying!" Sachs murmured, and now with only a semblance of playfulness to veil his gravity. "You have never cried! That is indeed a strange thing; a sadder thing, it seems to me, than you can know."

Wehlitz's gaze was lighted with triumph. "Ah!

You did not understand of what a breed is my young falcon, Conrad. Not for her our Germanic sentimentalities! Not for her our moon-gazing! No! She is of the race of the masters, of those who walk proud and tearless."

Sachs made no reply. A waiter came in bearing on his shoulder the tray of coffee and cakes, and he rose to make way for him.

Eleanora darted forward, insisting that Annetta should do the honours of the occasion. "You, my dear Ludwig, are not fit to sit up," she cried. Mrs. Fennamy could read in her old friend's brooding, excited gaze her satisfaction in the air of intimacy, of unity, implied in this. To see Annetta sitting there at Ludwig's board, dispensing Ludwig's fare, was almost to see her blessing a compact.

"We lack only Lüdenstein," Wehlitz observed when the table was drawn near his couch and the coffee was being poured out. He had still his air of child-like gaiety.

Conrad's discomfiture, for so he read it, had completed his felicity. Once or twice, while the table was being adjusted, he had murmured under his breath: "There are no tears!" Now, if an alien memory came, it came with hardly a shadow. "We lack Lüdenstein," he said, looking genially around the board. "But I do not think we shall greatly miss him, eh? He is too sophisticated a person for these simple gatherings, and neither Eleanora nor Conrad cherishes him. Conrad tells me that he played to

you this morning, Persis? You enjoyed his music? He is an accomplished musician — Ernst."

His eyes were on her and a certain intentness in them fixed her. To her dismay and to her anger, Persis felt that, suddenly, beneath this gaze, her colour rose. She blushed seldom and when she did so, the clear, bright carmine, springing, like a hot flower laid on either cheek, told, as she knew, with an exaggerated significance. She called an added calmness to her eyes and said, yes, Graf von Lüdenstein had played to them, and she thought him an admirable musician.

"Ah, yes." Wehlitz sat gazing at her. "He played to you. So Conrad told me. And he stayed long? It was a long visit? I was surprised to hear that Lüdenstein, too, counted you as a friend."

"Yes, he stayed for some time." She spoke coldly now, while the hot flower glowed and she was furious and miserable.

Wehlitz continued to look at her fixedly for some more moments and then, setting his cup of coffee, untouched, upon the table, he lay down again, turning his back upon them.

A disastrous silence fell upon the little group. Persis gazed before her, her colour slowly dying, her lips haughtily serene. Herr Sachs feigned to busy himself, unperturbedly, with the sugar and tongs.

Eleanora's eyes met her Annetta's in an almost desperate supplication. And Annetta nobly came to the rescue.

"I wish I'd heard him play," she said. "It was

rather unfair of Persis to have him play to her and then turn him over to me for the talking. I don't cherish him, either, and I can't say I enjoyed it. We talked about French plays, Persis, and acting. It might have interested you."

"Ah, he is not accustomed to being left in the lurch like that!" Eleanora breathed forth with more apparent gratitude than grace. "He was disconcerted, no doubt, by the withdrawal of half his audience."

"I don't exactly consider myself the lurch," Mrs. Fennamy commented with a benign touch of playfulness. "But I suppose he did think Persis would have cared to stay and talk to him, when he 'd done playing. Yes; do let me give you some fresh coffee, Herr Wehlitz, coffee is so horrid when it 's the least tepid."

Wehlitz had again turned on his side to fix his eyes again on Persis and Mrs. Fennamy's adroitness enabled him to re-enter the circle with the least possible emphasis.

His restored spirits mounted to the pitch of hilarity. He loudly laughed, and talked with volubility. He discussed French acting with Mrs. Fennamy and Italian with Eleanora. "But of them all," he cried, "Conrad is the best. Yes, you did not know that we had a finished comedian with us! Give us the dogs, Conrad! the fighting dogs; it is not a cruel mimicry, Persis, I assure you. Frenzy rather than pain; their joy transcends their tragedy! Ha! ha! we can laugh at our most solemn truths, Persis, you and I. No

tears for us! There, crouch behind the table, it is better when one does not see you. And after the dogs give us the pigs battling at their trough!"

Sachs obediently disappeared, and Persis and her mother, whose sense of humour but thinly veined their natures and ran to no deep ore, sat, more astonished than amused at the immediate outburst of ferocious sounds. Shrieks, growls, strangled breaths, one vizualised the combat; the teeth buried in the opponent's hair, the snatching jaws, the rearings and the falls. And after the tempest came the retreat, full of dignity, deliberation; an intermittent thunder-roll of dying growls suggested the stiff, slow trot which carried the combattants in opposite directions. Wehlitz laughed like a child; laughed until the tears ran down. He lay back against his cushions, beating applause with a clenched fist on the arm of his sofa. "And now the pigs!" he shouted, "The pigs that feed and buffet one another! Admirable! Inimitable, Conrad!"

Sachs placed himself behind a chair, running his fists between the bars to simulate the lithe and eager snouts, and again he impersonated as accurately these animals as they gulped and squealed and grunted.

"Ah, there is no one like you, Conrad, no one!" Wehlitz gasped, fallen back, breathless, among his cushions. "It is a miracle! You do not laugh, Persis? You are too amazed to laugh?"

"I have been laughing," said Persis, gazing at the young man who, red, panting and dishevelled, rose from behind his chair.

"You wonder at a person being willing to make himself so ludicrous? That is it. But it is Conrad's strength that he does not object to making himself ludicrous. Eh, Conrad?" The young man, however, pulling at his cuffs, adjusting his collar and mopping his forehead, stood, his face fallen to sobriety, looking a little abashed.

"Oh, I did not think of that at all," said Persis, still examining him. "But it was disconcerting, as well as comical, as if one saw someone metamorphosed suddenly before one's eyes."

"And now," said Eleanora, rising with buoyancy from her place, "now I wish to show you, Annetta, a most beautiful and remarkable *arbuste* which I have found in the garden here. You, too, Herr Sachs, must come and tell us what it is, and if you are ignorant, know that we are more so. Come; we will leave Ludwig and Persis to entertain each other for a few moments."

Through this patent manœuvre Wehlitz and the young girl found themselves alone. A look of almost humble supplication at once clouded his face. "Ah, that is kind of Eleanora," he murmured; "she always reads my heart. I hoped for a word with you, Persis. Tell me, you are not seriously displeased with me?"

"Not seriously, perhaps," said Persis, looking at him thoughtfully if with no severity.

"Forgive me! Forgive me, then!" said Wehlitz, taking her hand, which she yielded. "It seemed to me—let me tell you all—that you changed colour when

I spoke of Ernst, and I wondered if he had in any way displeased you. But it was my imagination. You did not blush."

She was silent for a moment, and her young face assumed its aspect of almost sullen pride. "On the contrary, I did blush," she said.

"I was not then mistaken? you did?" Wehlitz paled visibly.

"You know quite well that I did," said Persis, "and you know quite well that what you wondered was not whether he had displeased me, but whether he had pleased me. I saw your jealousy, and it was in reply to that that my colour rose. It is foolish in me, I know; but it is because I am young. A glance, a word, can make me change colour."

For a long moment after this Wehlitz lay gazing at her as if bereft of all resource. Veils of shyness, of pride, of pain, seemed to drift across his face and, finally to pass, leaving him helpless before his blissful adoration. "And you still forgive me, if it is so?" he murmured. "You are true! brave! loyal! my better self!"

Smiling, with a little uneasiness, she said. "Oh, but now you idealise me. See, I am blushing again."

He gazed in rapture at the lovely colour. "And it is now for me. Ah! but I am ashamed. It is the truth; you read me like a book. It was jealousy of Ernst. And how unfounded. You left him, when he had finished playing to you. You left him to your

mother. Ah, the good lesson for Ernst, with his morning calls on young ladies."

"I left him because I had our work to do, yours and mine. But I might have cared to stay and talk. Why not? Why should he not come and see me?"

"Why not? why not, indeed!" Wehlitz cried. "You are a strong, free soul! a soul to be trusted! And you forgive me?"

He still had her hands and, the others, entering again, she rose, gently withdrawing them while she said, "Don't think of it again."

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Mrs. Fennamy and her daughter were gone, Wehlitz lay for some time silent, his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes fixed before him. Suddenly he called his friends. "Eleanora! Conrad! Here! Come to me." Eleanora and Sachs turned from the window where they had stood in silence. "I must have your help," said Wehlitz, looking up at them. "You see what my situation is. You read it plainly. I cannot live without her. What is to be done?"

Eleanora clasped her hands. "But, Ludwig, my dear, dear friend, what is done, when a man loves a woman and cannot live without her?"

A deep blush mounted to Wehlitz's brow. He sat up and hid his face in his hands. "I dare not!" he muttered presently.

Eleanora had drawn a chair beside the sofa and, casting a glance of prophetic gravity upon Sachs, who stood near by, she laid her hand on Wehlitz's shoulder and said: "Why not, Ludwig? Why not? Have you not everything to offer her? Your great name. Your great future, your devotion. Why should you not win her? And I know Persis's heart; cold, unawakened, it may be; but deep, with the profundity

of a northern lake. Never have I seen her so absorbed, so interested in any man as in you."

"She detests marriage! You heard her."

"I heard her! Yes! And you heed the dreams of a child? What does she know of life?"

"What does she know? Ah, you do not understand her as I do! Neither you nor Conrad understands that free soul! At the mere hint of bonds and burdens, I may find that I have lost her! It is because she believes me to be unlike other men that she has become my friend!" He tossed restlessly upon the sofa as he spoke, beating down his cushions and half burying his face in them. "Yet, how shall I keep her near my life without bringing the shadows of gossip about her head? This was my thought the other night, Conrad. Yes, there was sincerity in my hope for you, though you mocked at it." And again he hid his face muttering, "Yet self-delusion, too! self-delusion. I could not share her. Not even her friendship. Pitiful to-day! pitiful! so to expose my jealousy to her!"

"But, Ludwig," Sachs said, seating himself at the foot of the sofa and casting a quietly merry glance upon his friend, "why should you judge your state with such severity? Does one ask composure and wisdom from a man in love? Come; is it not plain to us all that it is you who must win Fräulein Fennamy? It must indeed be plain to her. And now let us lay our heads together and seek out the best way of winning this young lady who has never shed a tear."

"Yes, yes. In Heaven's name, Ludwig, no dreams! no follies!" Eleanora cried. "May she never know that you indulged them. Listen to Herr Sachs. He speaks like the man of sense he is!"

"Yes, I am listening." Ludwig clutched at his head. "Think for me. I am distraught! Shall I say that I ask no more than a nominal marriage, so that I may be with her always? I can promise her to rise above lesser desires."

"Good heavens, Ludwig," said Eleanora, "do not take the spiritual arrogance of a child so seriously! You must tell her that you ask all—all, of her! No woman welcomes a bloodless devotion—whatever she may tell herself."

"I understand her, I say, and you do not," Wehlitz cried angrily. "It is for her to dictate the terms of our union. She must be told that I ask only the torch of her spirit, taking fire from mine, lighting thus our united paths. She must be told that our children, if she so wishes it, shall be the works that we shall write together, she to be my spur and stay! Yes; I am nearer to her heart than you think and I read it as you cannot. Conrad shall convey my suit to her. I shall go away. I shall go away at once." He sat up, casting off the rugs that covered him.

Eleanora raised her hands to heaven. "Ludwig, stay, I conjure you. Listen to me," she cried, grasping his arm to detain him. "Listen to me, and to Herr Sachs, who will tell you what I tell you. Put it so if you will, say what you will to her; but let her see

that it is from no lack of ardour in yourself; that is all I ask of you. Plead your own cause, whatever the cause may be. I beseech you to listen to me!"

"No, no, no!" Wehlitz had risen and, in great agitation, was feeling in his pockets, stroking down his hair, walking to and fro as if uncertain what steps to take towards instant flight. "You do not understand, my good Eleanora, neither her nor me. I should alienate her by ardour. She shrinks from ardour. And to speak to her myself would shatter me. I am not a man of the burly physical type. It is beyond my strength. Conrad will plead my cause for me and I will go to-night to my mother. The time-table. Where is the time-table? let one be brought!" He rang violently.

Eleanora had fallen back in her chair and sat gazing at him despairingly. The man came and returned with the time-table, and only after he had gone again and while Wehlitz, with shaking fingers, was turning the leaves, did she say: "You are not fit to go alone on any journey, Ludwig. May I not go to Persis to plead your cause, while Herr Sachs goes with you?"

Sachs had remained sitting on the end of the sofa, his eyes thoughtfully downcast; he raised them now with a look of gratitude. "Well found, signorina!" he said. "It would be much better so. I have no gift with young ladies."

"No, no, no! I will not have it so!" Wehlitz cried, pausing from his search. "I will not, do you hear? This one is not as other young ladies. It is

Conrad's lack of gift that will do more for me than all your eloquence, Eleanora! I fear your eloquence! She will distrust it. Conrad will say for me what I cannot say for myself. You will go to her, Conrad? You will not refuse to do me this service?"

"No, I will not refuse, Ludwig. But I agree with the Signorina. It would be better if you were to go yourself."

Wehlitz shook the words away with an impatient hand. "Enough; I will not; I cannot. Already the thought of it has put me in a fever. You go, then, to-morrow morning; and you will tell her what I have said, that it is for her to determine the conditions of our union. And if she cannot accept me, you will secure from her promise that our friendship shall continue on its present footing. Do you see, Conrad? I shall have done nothing, in that case, to jeopardise it. And you will telegraph to me, at once, Conrad?"

"Yes. But since it is to be to-morrow, why not wait quietly here?"

"No. I cannot remain here and wait to learn my fate." He looked about the room with a haggard gaze. "If she will not unite her life with mine, I cannot see her for some days. It will need my strength, fully recovered, to face the blow. I must gather myself together. I must compose myself. Already I have shown myself to her in a pitiable light; like a foolish school-boy, that has been my behaviour. If she will not accept me, I must learn to meet her in another fashion, with the dignity, the authority of

one who is her master as well as a friend." He walked up and down, running his hand through his hair.

Sachs picked up the forgotten time-table. "And what train will you take, Ludwig? I see one here at half-past seven. That will give you time to eat while I put your clothes together."

Eleanora now rose. "You are not fit to go alone, Ludwig. You will, at all events, however futile you consider me, allow me to accompany you."

He turned to look at her. He gazed and then broke into a short, almost a playful laugh, holding out his hands. "What friends I have!" he cried. "What friends! Was it not you who found me futile, Eleanora? You demanded of me that I should be another man than what I am. Ah, we shall not quarrel further. Yes; you will come with me, and you will pray for me to your good old grandpapa in heaven that I shall be made happy. You believe that there may be a chance for me, Eleanora? Yes; you have said so. Ah, those eyes of hers! Those eyes of dawn over the sea! And they may dawn for me, for me, Eleanora; over my darkness! Who can tell? Come; come; to eat, as Conrad says. We must be strong to face these coming days."

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Persis came into her mother's room next morning she found her reading a sheet hastily dashed with Eleanora's large, excitable hand-writing and her expression as she looked up from it was oddly compounded of satisfaction and perplexity. "What do you think, Persis," she said, "Herr Wehlitz has gone away with Eleanora. They went yesterday evening; right after we'd been there. And Herr Sachs is coming this morning to explain. Here, read it yourself. Eleanora is evidently very agitated." Mrs. Fennamy took up the coffee-pot and poured out the coffee, thus giving Persis an opportunity, did she desire one, of composing her features. Persis read the note. It was dated 6.45—an hour hardly after she and her mother had left the hotel—and written, evidently in the greatest haste, on the hotel note-paper. Eleanora gave them her blessing and said that she would see them again soon. "How very extraordinary," Persis commented, laying the sheet down on the breakfast tray. Her voice was even, and as she spoke she drew her chair up to the bed and took a roll from beneath its napkin. But, with swift upward glance, her mother saw that her face had been stricken, as if by a sudden blow, into an amazed rigidity.

"Do you suppose he's gone mad, poor fellow?" Mrs. Fennamy suggested. "He looked very queer and wild yesterday, and the way he behaved about Graf von Lüdenstein was hardly sane. Did he say anything to you about Graf von Lüdenstein after we left you?"

Persis had buttered her roll and was drinking her coffee. "Yes. I told him that he had displeased me and he asked my pardon. He seemed to me very childish, but not at all insane." Under her frosty composure her mind was snatching at conjectures. Was it possible that the puerile jealousy had returned and that it had determined him to leave her? Did he trust her so little and insult her so deeply? And how could he have gone like this without a word to her? Eleanora's discretion, as of one who picked cautious footsteps about a shrine—or might it be a tomb?—was full of portentous implications. "It's a very silly note," she observed presently.

"Well, dear Eleanora is pretty silly sometimes. We know that," Mrs. Fennamy returned. "Was there ever anybody so ready to put herself out for her friends? Think of her going off with him like this at a moment's notice, not giving herself time, I suppose, to take a night-gown and a tooth-brush. Of course he looked hardly fit to stand alone, but I should have thought Herr Sachs would have gone with him or that they would have taken a later train; she says the 7.30, does n't she? It looks as if they were just crazy to get off." And since Persis remained silent,

she added: "Perhaps he has had a stroke or fit or something and wants Herr Sachs to teach you philosophy."

After a pause, Persis answered this last surmise. "Ludwig is n't likely to send Herr Sachs as a substitute. If he is really gone for good I shall go on with my philosophy at a university."

This suggestion was more pleasing to Mrs. Fennamy than a wish Persis had expressed the year before to go on the stage. She hoped that the wound to her child's pride was not deep; and at all events, she felt secure in the belief, her heart had escaped untouched.

It was a sparkling autumn morning and since there was over an hour to wait before Herr Sachs should come, Persis went out for her usual morning walk along the river path. The woods lay on one side, and on the other, the water shining between them, a row of young poplars edged the river bank. Persis glanced about her as she walked, after her wont. She held her head high and in her white dress, with her shining eyes and fresh pallor, looked as radiant as the morning.

But a heavy depression was upon her and no pride or feigned indifference could hide from her the fact that she was suffering. Wehlitz could not be dismissed as one among the many episodes of her nomadic life. He had altered her existence to its very foundations, already, in these few days. Childish she might find him, and at moments deeply wearying, but no one had

ever come so near to her or moved her so profoundly. No one had ever demanded so much of her or made her feel herself so much. She felt herself now not only disorganized but diminished. Bewilderment mingled with her dismay.

Suddenly, at a turning of the path, she came face to face with Lüdenstein. He had taken the waters at the little *Kur-Haus* half a mile away, and was walking with his hands clasped over his stick behind him, his head raised while he drew in long breaths of the aromatic air. The sunlight sparkled on his golden beard. Persis, as she saw him, stopped short and she could not have said whether fear or pride more moved her.

"Good-morning, Fräulein," said Lüdenstein, doffing his hat and sweeping her a low bow. "I am fortunate. Do you often walk here in the morning?"

He knew, perhaps, the reason for Ludwig's departure. If he did, it was strange that he should not at once speak of it. She would ask him nothing, but he might tell her. She realized that she resented the position in which she was placed in regard to Herr Sachs. She hoped that Lüdenstein, rather than Ludwig's emissary, might enlighten her.

"Good-morning," she said. She did not give him her hand though she smiled upon him coldly, nor did she answer his question. He had turned to walk beside her. "You clear your thoughts before the lesson?" he went on, and his glance this morning

was almost flawlessly paternal. "Is it still at ten o'clock?"

"There is to be no lesson this morning," said Persis, "Ludwig has left Tannenkreuz. Did you not know?"

Lüdenstein stopped short in the path to gaze at her. "Ludwig has left Tannenkreuz?"

"Yes." She continued to smile, and there was irony in the smile.

"But when? How? With whom?"

"Last night. An hour after mamma and I had left him. Signorina Zardo has gone with him. We heard only this morning."

"*Herr Gott!*" Lüdenstein ejaculated. "This is surprising. And may I ask the reason for this sudden departure? I have been told nothing."

"I have not been told yet, either. Herr Sachs is coming this morning at ten to explain everything to me." There was a deeper satisfaction, certainly, in enlightening Graf von Lüdenstein than in receiving enlightenment from him. He stood beside her in the path looking down at her, and behind his glasses his sleepy eyes showed a keen scrutiny.

"Sachs is coming to see you. Ludwig has sent Sachs to you," he murmured, and then, turning to walk on, he added after a moment, pulling gently at his beard: "Ah, yes—I see. I think, now, that I begin to read the riddle."

"Perhaps you will give me the key to it, then," said Persis. "For I am very much in the dark."

Lüdenstein seemed deeply to muse, and a faint chuckle agitated his shoulders. "The riddles of Ludwig's eccentricities are difficult at times to read," he said; "but, yes, I think that I can interpret this one for you. Little Sachs; the court jester; Ludwig's own very particular property. Yes; it is the key; unmistakably. But perhaps, in fairness to our friend, it would be better that little Sachs himself should put it into your hands." He was laughing softly now, shaking his head, his eyebrows raised as though at some inconceivably comical revelation.

"Not at all," Persis said with some urgency. "I would rather know beforehand. I can't imagine why Herr Sachs should be sent to me, why Ludwig did n't write to me. That would have been the natural thing to do, the simple thing."

"The natural thing, the simple thing, is not the thing to which our Ludwig is by temperament inclined. No, no; it is drama, mystery, romance, that he craves, realist though he imagines himself to be. He has constructed drama and romance in this case from very singular materials, from very disparate materials, one must own; but is it not the function of romance to unite the singular and the disparate? Prepare, then, for a surprise, Fräulein, when I tell you that Ludwig's hope is that you may become the wife of little Sachs. So he will secure his court jester and his Egeria at once."

The young girl's eyes were on him, fixed in a gaze of blank astonishment. She had stopped still in her

walk. "What do you mean?" she stammered.

"What I say, Fräulein. Ludwig proposed it to Sachs, the other evening, with all seriousness in my presence. It is true that Sachs refused to consider the idea. Ludwig since then, inconceivable as I own I find it, for Sachs is by no means devoid of wits, must have over-persuaded him."

She now walked forward again. She looked before her steadily. To have turned her eyes on Graf von Lüdenstein would have been to avow too helplessly her anger and her humiliation; but glancing aside at her as they went he could note that her delicate, stubborn profile, with its child-like forehead and petulant lips, had stiffened into a look of intense, repudiating pride.

"I am afraid that I have unpleasantly surprised you, Fräulein," he said. "Do not take it hardly. It is a comedy; to be laughed at—and you will laugh at it—and at him—when friend Sachs repeats it to you. Eh! eh! that young man! What effrontery! But it is the effrontery of sheer *naïveté.* And with our poor Ludwig, too, Fräulein, it is *naïveté;* do not forget that. Do not be angry with him."

After a few more moments, in a low voice, Persis said: "What could have been his motive? Is he mad?"

"His motive? Why the happiness of his friend—of his friends. It is not only devotion to Sachs; but devotion to you. Ah, he enlarged upon the advantages to you of such a mate!"

"He could think of that little man as a fitting husband for me." Disdain and disgust curled her lips.

"Ludwig does not see our realisms, Fräulein; he does not see Sachs as he is. Anything that is his own becomes in Ludwig's eyes precious and significant and desirable. Sachs he counts as his very own."

"He has no right to count me as his very own." Her chagrin was so intense that she found herself helplessly sharing it with this stranger.

"No?" Lüdenstein smiled. "Yet it is, you must own it, part of Ludwig's charm that where he counts himself yours he takes complete reciprocity for granted."

They walked on in silence a little further and Persis then said that she would go back. "It will be time for Herr Sachs to come."

Lüdenstein turned with her. "Do not be angry with Ludwig, Fräulein, let me beg it of you again. I should feel, unless you can treat this lightly, that I have done him a wrong."

"I asked you to tell me."

"True; yet I should not have offered my solution had I realized that you would feel in Ludwig's project a personal affront. You would not do so if you understood him. He is ignorant of the standards and perceptions of the world."

"I am quite as indifferent to the standards of the world as he can be," said Persis haughtily. "No artificial standard should have been required to pre-

serve Ludwig from such presumption and such stupidity."

They said no more until the pension grille was reached, Lüdenstein's glance, deliberate and adroit, turning on her from time to time with a look of quiet amusement tinged with a certain cautious satisfaction.

"Good-bye," she said, stepping into the garden. She drew the grille behind her.

"Au revoir, surely," said Lüdenstein.

Persis gazed above his head. "I do not know. We may be leaving Tannenkreuz. It does not interest me here very much."

"But Ludwig will still hope to be your master. Why should Sachs's rebuff change your relation?"

She swung the grille slightly on its creaking hinges, still not looking at him. "And there is our music," Lüdenstein added. "Will you not stay for that?"

"Oh no; I should not stay for that," said Persis. The bitterness of her self-absorption wrapped her in indifference to Graf von Lüdenstein.

She felt now that she wished to leave Tannenkreuz and never again to see either Ludwig or Herr Sachs or this ambiguous man who stood before her. "Good-bye," she repeated, and she closed the grille decisively.

CHAPTER XIII

HERR SACHS had already arrived. He was waiting for her in their little sitting-room, perched on the edge of a chair, his crutch beside him, his hat held awkwardly in his hands.

The burning images that crowded her mind focussed themselves upon this ungainly figure. Here was the end of the fairy-tale into which she had felt herself caught up. She was confronted with a toad, and it was Ludwig who had sent the toad to her. The icy contempt with which she fixed the young man was less for him than for Ludwig; yet that he was at once aware of it she saw, for he started to his feet, blushing furiously, knocking over his crutch, dropping his hat, and becoming for the moment such a merely piteous spectacle that Persis, involuntarily, stooped and restored the hat and crutch to him.

"*Vielen Dank, vielen Dank,* Fräulein," he breathed.

"Sit down," said Persis in a voice of frosty courtesy. "You have come to see me? I hear from Signorina Zardo that Herr Wehlitz has left Tannenkreuz. Is it for good?"

Sachs had sunk again to the edge of his chair, but Persis remained standing before him, the princess, indeed, in her whites and golds and greens, the

princess confronting the toad, and her heart was bitter not so much against the poor, dun, dusty toad, gaping in its toad-like stupidity, as against the friend, the supposed friend, who had sent him to her with his inconceivable request. For Sachs was indeed gaping blankly, as he echoed; "For good, Fräulein?" staring up at her; and in his consternation, for it was that, he had lost his confusion.

"Yes; is it for good that he is gone?" Persis repeated. "He has not vouchsafed any explanation to me."

"I have come with a message to you from Ludwig, Fräulein," said Sachs, after a slight pause in which they looked at each other, she standing beside the table, her finger-tips resting tensely upon it. "But you make it difficult to give. You almost make me feel, in advance, that it is useless."

"I know your message, Herr Sachs," said Persis then. She was becoming sorry for him and she could not bear to let him go on and croak out his grotesque proposal. Hurrying her words, her colour rising, she went on: "I know it, so please don't try to say anything further about it. It is some very fantastic ideal of friendship that has brought you here; for even if Ludwig in his devotion to you did not see how impossible it was, you should have seen it for yourself. It is impossible, Herr Sachs"—his gaze of intense astonishment, instead of checking her, drove her to an extreme of literalness—"quite impossible. I could never marry you."

She looked about her, as she heard her lips bring out these last words, with frowning helplessness, unwilling to witness Herr Sachs's pitiful confusion; and sinking on a chair that stood near by she fixed her eyes on the window and for a long time, it seemed to her, there was silence. Then she heard Herr Sachs's voice, burdened, groping, as if in the sudden obscurity she had cast about him it sought for an exit. "But that is not the message I have come with. Who has told you this, Fräulein?" he asked gently.

His clear impersonality could not help her; she was dyed in blushes. "It was the other evening, he said, and in his presence, that Ludwig suggested it. You must forgive me; but it seemed the only explanation; Graf von Lüdenstein did not know, either, of any reason for Ludwig's going away suddenly or why you should be sent to me. He said he thought it must be this. I am so sorry."

"Yes. I see," said Sachs looking gravely at her. "And you have just come from him. Would it not perhaps have been better to have waited to hear what I had to tell you before you questioned Graf von Lüdenstein?"

She was abashed. "Yes. It would have been better. But I was troubled. I could not understand. Ludwig seemed to have treated me with so little consideration."

"I see," Herr Sachs repeated, and for a few moments there was a silence in which Persis tasted perhaps the deepest discomfiture she had ever known. "I

see," Herr Sachs took up after this pause. "And you have just come from him. He may have believed what he told you; but this was ill done of Graf von Lüdenstein; very ill done."

"I asked him," Persis murmured. "He said that he thought he understood and I asked him to let me understand too. It was not true, then?"

"Yes; it was true; after a fashion, true," said Sachs, with his preoccupied air. "Ludwig, for a moment, on that evening, may have deluded himself into thinking that he really wished such a thing.

"He had renounced the idea of marriage for himself, and, since he idealizes all those he loves, I seemed to him, perhaps, for the moment, worthy of such an alliance. But Graf von Lüdenstein knew how I received the suggestion. He knew that I laughed it to scorn. Ah; a very paltry action."

"He said you laughed. He thought Ludwig must have over-persuaded you. Why should he have told me of it unless he believed it possible?"

"Why indeed? For he is Ludwig's friend. But Ludwig vexed him that night; and intended to vex him. There was that beneath it, too, beneath this foolish idea of Ludwig's. It was a challenge to Lüdenstein. He is jealous of Lüdenstein. I need not tell you that." He still pondered, his eyes on the ground and she felt herself wishing that they could rest upon her again, in forgiveness.

"I am glad that you see, too, how very fantastic and foolish an idea it was," she murmured. "I do

not mean of course," she added hastily, though hardly more happily, "that you are unworthy of many people. Only—for one man to offer a woman to another man, a man she hardly knows; you see it is fantastic."

"Quite as clearly as you do, Fräulein; quite as clearly as Graf von Lüdenstein does, I assure you. Ludwig often is fantastic." They seemed to have forgotten what the message, presumably not fantastic, that had brought him to her, might be. Persis recalled it to him.

"What was Ludwig's message, then?" she questioned.

He looked at her at last, not now with any severity, but with a deep, scrutinizing perplexity. And without speaking he examined her thus for some moments before he asked, "Do you not guess it, Fräulein?"

She shook her head, her eyes dwelling on his. She did not guess it; not at all.

"I have come to ask you, Fräulein, if you will marry Ludwig," said Sachs. "Surely you have seen how deeply he loves you."

Persis as she heard these words rose to her feet.

It was the first time that she had ever been asked in marriage and the request changed her to herself. After her great astonishment, joy and fear thrilled in her, and then the wave of a dark regret, as if for something precious yet spoiled. "Tell me," she said in a dull voice. "What does he say to me?"

"It was after you had gone yesterday, Fräulein," said Sachs, looking away from her, "and he told us, Signorina Zardo and me, that he could not live without you. And he could not bear to wait here until he had your answer. So it was arranged that I should come to you while he, with the Signorina, went for some days to his mother. He will be patient." Sachs's eyes again turned on her; "He will wait as long as you wish if you will give him hope. He knows that it is sudden and that you may feel you can give no answer yet; but he loves you so much that he could not keep silence any longer."

There had flashed into her capricious mind now, from a distant past, the memory of a beautiful doll, waxen, golden, rosy, with real hair, and eyes that closed, and clothes of silk and lawn. It had been put into her hands on a Christmas morning and afterwards, in the grave delights of examination, she had discovered that its feet were abbreviated to the point of deformity and that they had painted shoes and socks upon them. The doll had been spoiled for her. So it was now.

"How can he love me if only the other day he wished you to marry me?"

Herr Sachs had watched her clouding, downcast face. "But that was still to love you—though to love you differently, Fräulein. He did not then know you so well, and it was as a sister and comrade that he wished to keep you in his life."

"But it was so absurd of Ludwig; worse than fan-

tastic; how could a man be so absurd? To have thought of you and me; two people who do not care for each other at all; who hardly know each other. Such absurdity makes a man almost repulsive. I must say it."

"But Ludwig was not so absurd as that, Fräulein," said Sachs, his manner of patient determination unchanged. "It is not true to say neither of us cared. Ludwig had seen that I admired you very much; that I was much smitten. He is quick, very quick, at seeing such things."

She felt herself turning helplessly in a tangled *Märchen* where the very trees took human shape and spoke to her.

"You admired me very much? You were much smitten?" Her own dazed voice seemed to come from far away and to be part of the fairy-tale.

"Yes, Fräulein," said Sachs faintly smiling. "A cat, you know, may look at a king."

She stared and stared at him, her brows knitted in the effort to understand. "You would have liked to marry me? Ludwig saw that you would have liked to marry me?"

"Oh, for that, Fräulein, the idea could never have crossed my mind. I only tell you this so that you may see that Ludwig's was not quite the absurdity you thought it."

She pushed her way on among the interlacing branches of the wonderland. "But how is it possible? How could he have seen that you cared?

How could you care when you do not know me and have hardly seen me?"

Sachs, now, as he looked at her, gave a slight and deprecatory grimace.

"But, Fräulein, there is such a thing as love at first sight. You are young, and beautiful, and strange, too, like a vision. Why should one not care at once? It was *Schwärmerei,* if you like," he found the word with evident relief, "pure *Schwärmerei,* as when we Germans look at the moon and the tears drip. It came to me like that, when I saw you, that first time, under the trees in the *Kur-Garten.* I am a susceptible fellow and I do not often see beautiful young ladies. You will not be displeased with me, or blame me? It is only the cat who looks at the king and admires the crown and sceptre and the bright, royal face."

She had sunk, while he spoke, on to the little sofa that was placed across a corner of the room, and, fallen together, her arms lying limply along her lap, she gazed at him with something indeed of the expression of the king whom the cat had suddenly addressed in a common tongue. She was absorbed in wonder at Herr Sachs. He had taken out his handkerchief and rubbed his forehead with it, casting glances of some anxiety towards her, and now, as she did not speak, he went on with a little timidity. "So you will see that it was fantastic, Ludwig's devotion to me, Fräulein, but not so absurd, not so absurd as to be repulsive."

Her thoughts returned to the spoiled treasure; it

had, undoubtedly, regained more normal proportions and a more adequate attire.

Sachs's face brightened as he saw from hers that he had lifted the darkest shadow from his friend.

"No, not so absurd," she owned. But she went on presently. "If he is not so absurd, he is all the more unkind. If he saw what you were feeling, how could he bear to send you? Why did he not come himself? Was n't it to make use of your devotion for him?"

And almost with a touch of his quaint merriment, Sachs answered. "But Fräulein, he knows that all I could ask is to be allowed to look! he knows that it would not be possible for me to think seriously of romance in connection with myself, he knows that I feel it the greatest privilege and happiness to come—if only I can succeed for him. Why should he not send me? He would have come himself but that he fears as deeply as he loves. He is not strong. It would have broken him to face your refusal."

She smiled a little at him now, finding his smile infectious. "I wonder that he did not send Eleanora," she observed.

"Ah, she and I urged it upon him," said Sachs. "She is, it is true, as whole-hearted in this matter as I am; but she is perhaps not so wise; that is what Ludwig felt. He said that he feared her eloquence; and was there not some truth in that? I think there was. You know her too well. It was better that a stranger should come, and a delegate only; not a

pleader and advocate; that might have antagonized you."

Still she smiled at him, though more gravely, and she said, after a moment: "Sit down here. You must be tired." He had been standing for a long time, leaning on his crutch. He sat down beside her on the sofa and she went on, her brooding, sombre look altering her face; "I have never wished to marry. I do not like marriage. You know we talked of Tolstoi. I do not say that he is right; but, personally, I feel with Tolstoi."

It was her girlish mind, perplexed and groping, that spoke. The words did not translate the curious, cold tumult of her heart.

"I know Tolstoi. Yes, I do not feel with him. And Ludwig does not feel with him," Herr Sachs replied. "You condemn life, then? Ludwig has then not yet cured you of that?"

"I was only speaking for myself—for my own feeling. Would it not stultify one, marriage? and tie one? the woman especially? Married women usually seem to me to become like vegetables, dull, rooted, only significant because they are edible and succulent, so to speak!" She smiled a little bitterly over her simile. "Unmarried, one may remain a flame. I want to remain a flame."

"One must be rooted if one is to grow, Fräulein. Why not a flower? The married life, it seems to me, is the highest life; the shared life, stronger, fuller, through union, and growing from its joy into other

lives. A flame is sterile, Fräulein, and is soon extinguished."

She sat, attentive, yet unconvinced. What he said might be true, but she could not connect his words with Ludwig. And, as the silence grew long, Sachs went on. "But Ludwig knows your mind on this. He would not oppress you with choices too difficult. That is what he has charged me to say; there need be no such choice for you. If you will take his name and share his life it will be for you to determine the conditions of your union. All that he asks is to have you near him always. He would want of you nothing that you did not freely, gladly give."

She sat looking down at her clasped hands. His words astonished her, if further astonishment were possible. Relief, as of a stress removed, seemed to follow them, and the widening again of strange, new horizons. To be the great man's companion, to bear his name, and with no servitude to life. Yet the first flat taste of regret was not effaced. "It is very beautiful of Ludwig," she murmured.

"Ah, Fräulein, he is beautiful. It is not known or understood how beautiful he is," said Sachs with deep feeling. "He would give his life for what he loves. You will see. You will understand. You will bring him the happiness he so sorely needs."

She sat pondering. "How can you feel that I am the woman to make him happy? You know," she said, raising her eyes to his, "Eleanora always says, when she is displeased with me, that I have no heart,

and mamma, I know, thinks so too. It is true. I am hard. I see all the flaws in people and it makes them absurd to me. I sometimes feel there is nothing that I love. I do not mean that I am unhappy."

"You are very young, Fräulein," said Sachs, "and it is a child's heart you have, so young, so smooth, so hard. Yes, I feel that what you say is true. It is like a bird's egg, a young heart. But wait, and the soft tap-tap of the warm life within will begin and the little bird will break its shell and be ready for its flights. It is like a fairy-tale, Fräulein—you will find it so—the awakening of the heart to love."

He was smiling at her, reassuring her, for he read the trouble and perplexity on her face, and, as if she were indeed a child to whom a fairy-tale has been told, a wavering smile, candid and rueful and touched, answered him. And as they sat in silence, looking at each other, the young girl's mind, from the heights where far horizons opened about her, seemed to flutter down softly like a falling bird, down from the vastness and, as it were, into the eyes of Herr Sachs looking at her. This was not to fall to nothingness. She remembered her poem, and its sadness was far away. The eyes of Herr Sachs made her think of a nest; sweetness, tenderness, safety; had she ever thought them ugly? They surrounded and encompassed her as the soft grass, warm, translucent with sunlight, waves above the bird. Over the grass was the summer sky; and strange words, unaccustomed words, floated through her mind, like the breeze blow-

ing over the harvest: "The peace of God which passeth all understanding."

The silence had grown long. A little pony-carriage, driven with a cheerful flourish of the whip, went rattling down the street. Mrs. Fennamy's travelling-clock, the clock which had accompanied them on all their travels and which Persis remembered since her babyhood, gave the soft premonitory cluck which was its only symptom of age and then struck eleven deliberate, silvery notes. Listening to them Persis found herself smiling, for they made her think of the sound of bells heard from the meadows. All was sweet and beautiful.

"Tell me," she said, leaning towards the young man, "is that all you care about—that other people should find each other and be happy? You are so different from everybody; what is it?"

Herr Sachs blushed now and became again the shy, ungainly, ugly man: but she could never again see him as that. "We all wish those we love to be happy, do we not, Fräulein."

"Do we? I don't know. I never think about people being happy. I think so very little about other people," said Persis. "You think of them all the time. That is all your life means. I see that."

"By no means, Fräulein," he said, laughing. "I have my studies to think of and often, when I am deep in them, I forget that anything else exists."

"Even Ludwig?"

"Even Ludwig," he answered. And now, after their interlude, he led her back again to the purpose that had brought him there. "Will you now think of Ludwig, Fräulein, and of what he asks?"

"Yes, I will. I will think of it all day. I will give you my answer to-morrow. Is that right and fair?"

"Very right and fair, Fräulein." He had risen and, taking his hat and crutch, he moved towards the door. There he paused.

"Am I allowed to give one word of advice, Fräulein?"

"You are allowed to say anything you like—for ever!" Persis assured him, clasping her hands together under her chin and laughing at him, though gravely laughing.

Her trust, her gaiety, pleased and confused him, too, she saw. He was unaware how deeply she had come to know him. He blushed again as he said: "That is very good of you, Fräulein. Then, since I am permitted, I will ask you not to see Graf von Lüdenstein again to-day. Do not let him come near your deliberations. He might harm them."

Lüdenstein seemed indeed a wraith. It was an easy promise to make.

"You were very displeased with me for having talked to him, were you not?" she said, as she went beside him to the front door.

"Displeased with you, Fräulein?"

"Yes. I felt that you were quite angry with me

when I told you of our talk. It almost frightened me."

Sachs laughed. "I do not think that you are so easily frightened, Fräulein! But, yes; I was displeased." And his face assumed a retrospective severity as he said: "It was very ill done of Graf von Lüdenstein, very ill done indeed."

CHAPTER XIV

PERSIS wandered out into the garden and went slowly down the path. Her head was bent, her eyes on the mossy stones. As she came near the grille, she heard her mother's voice inquiring: "Well, Persis?"

Mrs. Fennamy was sitting at the bottom of the garden where the branches were lowest and the grass tallest. Her little work-box—another ancient memory—made of plaited Indian grass, which, after so many years, still kept the wild, sweet fragrance of the prairie, was beside her on the table and she was hemming, with her delicate, almost invisible, stitches, on a long strip of the fine lawn frilling that she and Persis wore in their dresses.

Persis, after standing still in the path for a moment, turned aside into the grass and joined her mother.

"Well?" Mrs. Fennamy repeated, glancing up at her. "What is it all about? *Is* he mad?"

It was unpleasant to have these surmises of the morning recalled at such a moment. Persis put them aside with a slight impatience. "He is not at all mad," she said. She took a chair on the other side of the table, and, leaning her elbows on it and her

head in her hands, she looked down at the Indian grass basket as she went on: "He is very beautiful and strange. He wants me to marry him. It was that Herr Sachs came to ask me."

As she spoke she lifted her eyes and rested them on her mother. There was no appeal or shyness in them. If they held an underlying anxiety it was unconscious. Yet Mrs. Fennamy read in them uncertainty and questioning and hope.

"Gracious!" she said, mildly, after a moment. She was aware that by an effort of will she controlled the rise of her colour. She continued to stitch.

Persis flushed faintly. "It is very quick, certainly; but not exactly surprising, mamma. From the first moment there was a deep congeniality between us, was n't there?"

"Was there? I should n't have called it that, exactly. I saw he was very much struck with you, of course. They all were. But that 's not congeniality, necessarily, is it? No; I should n't have said, somehow, that you were congenial. Just see if my scissors are in the basket, dear; I can't find them." Mrs. Fennamy felt among the turmoil of lawn upon her lap.

The scissors were in the basket and Persis, extracting them and handing them to her mother, asked, with an assumed nonchalance, "Why, pray?" as she did so.

"Well," Mrs. Fennamy snipped away a scrap of

lawn, "you 're both so set on your own ways for one thing."

"There is no reason why our ways should not be the same."

"No; perhaps not. He takes things, I should say, much harder than you do; little things, I mean. He 's such a nervous man." Mrs. Fennamy did not ask: Do you really think of marrying him?—but this was the question thudding at her heart.

"He is a very great man, mamma, and a very great genius. I have always felt that I should not care to marry at all unless it could be some one like that. Don't imagine that I 'm blind to the foibles—and even follies, if you like—there are in him. All geniuses, I imagine, have foibles and follies. The question is —what have they besides? You can see, of course, that he is as different from the ordinary man as an eagle is from a gander. And he thinks me remarkable, too. I could help him in his work. My criticism would be of real value to him. I can't imagine a more interesting life."

Mrs. Fennamy listened carefully. "I don't know about criticism. He 'll want you to accept everything he says and admire him for it. I expect the reason he quarrels with his friends is that they won't agree with him."

"He knows that I could not tolerate any relation that did not leave me complete independence. Our friendship has made that clear to him already."

"Are you sure he knows it? The way he treats a

friend will be different from the way he 'll treat his wife. I 've always found that Germans think of their wives as pillows, and that 's what he wants—something soothing and restful and always there to turn to when things go wrong." Mrs. Fennamy seemed mildly to surmise rather than to oppose.

Persis had leaned back in her chair and folded her arms. "I don't think so ill of Ludwig as that," she said.

"I don't see that it 's to think ill of him at all," Mrs. Fennamy rejoined. "A man of that sort does n't want a critic in his wife or some one who will tell him what his faults are or point out his mistakes to him. He 'll hear all that fast enough from outsiders. What he wants is some one who can pretend not to see what outsiders see, who can pretend to be satisfied with him and think he 's all right when he 's hurt and bothered and suspects things about himself; who 'll give him confidence enough in himself to go on with. He may not know it 's what he wants now, when he's so in love with you; but it is. And you don't strike me as one bit that kind of a woman, Persis," Mrs. Fennamy finished dispassionately.

Persis sat still, gazing down at the grass. "I certainly could not love a man who was too stupid to see his own faults," she remarked presently.

"Well," said Mrs. Fennamy, as dispassionately as before, "that 's being rather cruel, when you come to think of it, because hardly anybody does see their own

faults. That 's what I mean by saying that you 're not the kind of woman he needs."

" I could not love a man, then, who was not able or willing to recognise his faults when they were pointed out to him. That is not cruel."

" It 's not very loving."

" But, mamma, I should accept criticism from those I loved. Why should I not expect them to accept mine? All that I am asking is that I should be allowed to love. And I do not believe what you say of Ludwig. Already he has told me that I am his better self."

" Perhaps he 'll go on thinking so when you thwart him. My impression of him is that the one thing he can't accept is criticism."

They were silent for a little while after this, and then Persis presented another aspect of the case. " Besides, mamma," she said, " Ludwig is n't asking me to be his wife in that sense, at all. He is really asking for the things you imagine he rejects—comradeship, equality, mutual independence. You don't, in the least, appreciate his beauty and generosity. He has let me understand that it is for me to determine the conditions of our union. He knows my dislike of the idea of marriage. I mean," she added, as she saw her mother's face change and a more marked gravity fixed upon her, " he is in love with me but he does not ask me to be in love with him. Love is all he asks; not wifehood. I think it very beautiful of him."

Mrs. Fennamy, with a slight constriction of the lips,

remained silent for a moment, and again Persis felt her colour rise as if before an unexpected rebuff.

"I expect I like everyday, ordinary men who are in love in an everyday way better," Mrs. Fennamy remarked at last, and Persis was aware that the words understated her thoughts, and were carefully chosen. "I don't seem to understand a man very well who can carry generosity as far as that. I'd feel he could n't be in love himself, I expect."

"I don't think that you do understand Ludwig, mamma. I don't think that you 're capable of understanding him."

"I expect I 'm not," Mrs. Fennamy acquiesced, without any irony; and in a voice that accepted all fantastical interpretations she went on: "Is that why he went away, because he could n't ask you himself?"

"Yes. He is very sensitive; very over-strung." Persis spoke with a certain dryness, rising as she spoke.

"Well, if what he asks is comradeship, why should you marry him at all?" her mother inquired. "You don't need to marry a man to study his works."

Persis, passing her hands over the back of the chair as she stood above it, glanced at her with now apparent uncertainty. Was this not, after all, the crux of the situation?

"He has n't asked for anything more, so why should you give him anything more?" Mrs. Fennamy pursued, though without urgency.

"But he wants me to be always there. He wants me to live with him."

"Well, why should n't he see as much of you as he likes?"

"You mean that he could travel about with us?"

"Why I suppose he might just as well. People will know that you could marry him if you wanted to; so there could n't be very much made of it. All I mean is that if you 're not in love with him I don't see why you should marry him."

"No; I am not in love with him," said Persis, looking down thoughtfully at her hands which she still passed to and fro over the chill tin top of the chair. "No; I certainly am not in love with Ludwig." She was thinking of her love for Prince Marco, that hidden love which no one in the world, not even this shrewd little mother, had dreamed of.

If that had been to be in love, she certainly was not in love with Ludwig.

Mrs. Fennamy continued to sew. She was very sorry for Persis. She could not blame herself. She had denied herself any frank expression of her dismay, though she could not go so far as to pretend to Persis that she saw beauty where, in fact, she saw only weakness and absurdity. Yet it was as if, in happy confidence, her child had come to her holding a jewel on her open palm for her admiration, and as if she had commented, glancing at it: "Paste. I would n't have it if I were you."

"Well, I must think," Persis said at last, lifting her

hands. "I will go up to the woods. I don't want any lunch."

"Just buy some fruit and a roll, then, as you go down the street," Mrs. Fennamy suggested. "You 'll get so hungry after your walk."

"Yes; I 'll get some fruit," Persis acquiesced, moving away.

"I 'm sure you 'll do just what you feel best about Herr Wehlitz," Mrs. Fennamy added as Persis opened the grille.

CHAPTER XV

THE treasure was spoiled; the jewel had been pronounced paste; what had been troubled surmise was now clear vision. She saw how it had been spoiled, and why. It was as if, to return to the first metaphor, her mother had said: "You see, the shoes are painted, and no really good doll has painted shoes." The flaw lay deep in the fact, now recognised, that there was in this proposal of Ludwig's no romance and no passion; benevolence, no doubt, and beauty; but it had been the possibility of romance that, if it had disturbed, had also thrilled her.

She saw now that there had been no need for disturbance, no occasion for a thrill, and as she moved slowly away from her mother she knew that she did not intend to marry Ludwig. As her mother had said, you did not need to marry a man in order to study his works.

There was something else, too, but this she could not see so clearly. It lay, half-hidden, under all her thoughts that afternoon, as she wandered in the beech-woods, like the slightly malicious twinkle of a gold-fish in a pool of water. Herr Sachs had shown her beauty; but was it not, mainly, his own? Her mother had shown her something else.

A flash and turn of irony passed and repassed as she contemplated Ludwig and his wooing.

Herr Sachs came on the stroke of ten next morning and Persis, as she entered the sitting-room where he waited for her, saw that he had come full of hope.

"I have my answer," she said, giving him her hand; and she knew that there was a certain fictitious buoyancy in her demeanour which he, no doubt, could penetrate. "I don't think that it will displease you," —she had rehearsed what she was to say in the beech-woods—"when you have heard it all; for it is a rather long answer. I cannot marry Ludwig; but I think that I can make him happy. I want to devote myself to him and to his work. I have told mamma he is to come with us wherever we go—at any time and for as long as he likes. I don't trouble about conventions, and I know that he will not. And besides, mamma will be with us; you too, I hope, Herr Sachs, for I cannot imagine Ludwig parted from you. You see, there is really no reason at all why we should marry; we are both independent, and can do as we like, and though we love each other very truly, we are neither of us in love." Under the growing gravity of Herr Sachs's regard she heard herself speaking more quickly and with a little confusion, and she finished rather lamely, forgetting what she had meant to say at the last. "That is really what he wanted most, I believe—the right to be with me constantly, and to know that I am devoted to him."

All this time she had been holding Herr Sachs's

hand, and now, though instinctively she tried to retain it, he drew it away and leaned on the table, looking down in silence at the floor between them. And after a little pause, not raising his eyes, he said: "You are mistaken, Fräulein. Ludwig is in love with you."

The memory of her mother's glance returned to her. "Oh no, Herr Sachs! Really he is not," she admonished him, smiling slightly.

Herr Sachs's eyes were upon her, penetrating her. They seemed to see more than she was herself aware of, though she was aware that she hid something from him. "But I say yes, Fräulein. He is in love with you. Why do you contradict me?"

"A man who is in love does not send another man to plead his cause."

Yes; this is what her mother's glance had said, though it had said more besides.

"Why do you say that to me, Fräulein, when I tell you that it is not true?"

"He has asked only for comradeship. Why should the question of marriage arise at all?"

"Ludwig hopes for more than comradeship. It was what you said of your disdain of marriage, in the *Kur-Garten,* that made him unwilling to burden you with his hopes. Signorina Zardo pressed upon him that you might misunderstand his generosity; Ludwig believed you would not misunderstand. He believed that you were not as other women."

Under his severity she saw dismay, yet the severity

was disconcerting. "Are you angry with me?" she asked. "I cannot help it if he has not been able to make me feel that he is in love with me."

"No, Fräulein, no," said Sachs, looking away from her. "I do not understand your manner this morning, but it is with myself that I am angry. I have been stupid. I have failed to make you understand my friend." His face was sad and careworn, altered, indeed, from its first eager hope, and Persis replied with urgency:

"That is not so; I am sure it is not so. What I feel is that you make me understand him far better than he could himself. I am sure that you do. He is so vehement and so sensitive. I might have hurt him and he might have exasperated me. As it is, through you, I see his generosity clearly."

But Sachs still stood looking on the ground, as if discouraged beyond words.

"I will try to make him happy," Persis went on. "I know that I can make him happy. We will be the best and most loyal of friends; and we will study and I shall understand all that he writes and help him. Please see it as I do. Ludwig and I are not like other people. We are in a different world. Let other people marry. Tell him that I say that."

"I will tell him what you say, Fräulein," said Sachs, moving towards the door. "But what I see is that you do not love Ludwig as he loves you."

"What do you mean? Wait. Please wait. It 's as if you blamed me. If what you say is true—if I

do not love him as he loves me—what do you ask me to do? What do you think that it would be right for me to do?"

He paused, half turning to her, and stood trying, she saw, to see his way through his pain, perplexity and doubt. Then, after a moment, not lifting his eyes, he said: "If you do not love him as he loves you, would it not be best that he should not come back, Fräulein—that you should not see him again?"

A deep dismay filled Persis. "Not see him again? I must break my friendship with Ludwig because I am not in love with him?" She gazed at the young man almost aghast.

"I do not know," said Sachs, knitting his brows. "I do not know. It is for you to say. I only ask, if you cannot marry him, would it not be best that you should part?"

"But why? Why should we part? If I am to devote my life to him?"

"You say it, Fräulein, but I do not feel that you realize the seriousness of your promise. I do not feel you realize you are taking another's life into your hands. You will not play with it?"

"Play with it?"

He raised his eyes to hers. There was no sternness in them; only deep anxiety. "Yes, Fräulein; like a toy."

Her tears rose. She was keenly hurt. No one had ever had the power to hurt her so much. "You think me so shallow, so cruel, so childish," she

said. "And I thought that you were fond of me——"

He contemplated her, singularly detached, indeed, for a young man who had the day before confessed to *Schwärmerei.* "I should still be fond of you, Fräulein, if you were shallow and cruel and childish," he said. "But it is not that. I accuse you of none of these things. I do not, nor do you yourself, know what you are. But is it not true that a woman, thinking she means kindness towards the man whose love has disappointed her, may mean cruelty? And is it not true that what to Ludwig would be life or death, to you might be an interlude of life only, an amusement, a distraction? I do not know. It is for you to say."

She was displeased by some intimation in this speech, and though a faint fear, caught from his gravity, rose in her, she dismissed it with the thought that Herr Sachs could be *naif.* With that worshipful regard and care they all—and by all she meant Herr Sachs and Eleanora—surrounded Ludwig! It was a little ludicrous as well as a little belittling, to Ludwig himself. What did he mean by disappointed?

Her underlying displeasure betrayed itself. "You cannot think me disappointed in Ludwig's love," she said, and dryly, "since it was love, in the usual sense of the word, that made my first difficulty. Ludwig very nobly has removed that, and I do not think that Ludwig's trust in me is misplaced. You seem to think so—no, please let me go on. I know that you do not

mean to be unkind; but you say very strange things. I can't send him away. That would be cruelty, if you like, a priggish cruelty. What would Ludwig think of me if I refused to see him again because he has asked to spend his life with me? You must see that it would be ridiculous. It would only be wise if what you seem to think of me is true."

"No, no, Fräulein," he was able now to stammer, for she had brought him to some confusion. "I do not think it of you. I only asked you to be very sure of yourself before you went forward."

She could now afford to smile at him. "But I am sure of myself. I am not a cruel and shallow child. I do not say that it is a matter of life and death to me —I cannot think that it is that to Ludwig either—I cannot think that he is as brittle and as unreasonable as you imagine. But it certainly will not be a diversion or an interlude. I can be a true friend to Ludwig. Tell him so. Tell him that I am going to show him what such a friendship can be. You know, you Germans don't really believe in friendships between men and women, nor understand them."

She almost expected him to recognize the element of patronage in her words and to be offended by it; but, on the contrary, though still anxious, he seemed to listen very carefully, and almost, as it were, with a renewal of hope. "Perhaps that is true, Fräulein," he said when she had finished, disconcerting her somewhat, although she believed, indeed, that it was true. "Perhaps it is because I am a German and very

ignorant, moreover, of many things which, to people more experienced, are plain. Not that I can think that you understand Ludwig as I do. It will be a great blow to him, a great grief, to hear that you will not marry him. But it may be true that through your friendship you will be able to make him happy."

He had now opened the door, and his gentleness and sincerity made her feel compunction; renewing, too, the stir of fear within her. Did he, perhaps, after all, understand Ludwig better than she did? And did she realize, after all, what it was that she was undertaking? In any case it was impossible to face the trenchant alternative he put before her. "I promise you—I promise you——" she reiterated, giving him her hand. She did not quite know what she promised, but she felt that she owed something to Herr Sachs and that she must not disappoint him.

CHAPTER XVI

SIGNORINA ZARDO returned to Tannenkreuz the following afternoon, and came into the Fennamys' sitting-room at tea-time. It was hard for her to confront Annetta after the swift overthrow of her hopes; and Mrs. Fennamy read embarrassment in the deep melancholy of her gaze. Travel-worn and dusty, she sank down on a chair beside the table, shaking her head to the offer of tea and keeping a silence that combined reproach and stubbornness.

"This has all been very sudden, has n't it, Eleanora?" said Mrs. Fennamy, in a kindly if not a compassionate voice. "And I 'm afraid you 're tired out, rushing about with Herr Wehlitz as you have been doing. Has he come back with you?"

Persis asked no question, but her eyes were fixed upon Eleanora.

"No, he has not come back with me," said Eleanora. "He is walking, walking in the mountains." And after a pause she added: "He takes it bravely. But he has received a blow from which it will take him time to recover."

"Well, there was no reason exactly why he should expect anything else, was there?" said Mrs. Fennamy,

since Persis kept silence. "He had no reason for thinking Persis was in love with him. It seems to me it 's all ended just as comfortably as it could possibly have ended."

"No; he had no reason to think Persis was in love with him," Eleanora echoed with bitterness, "and I much doubt whether the man lives who ever will have reason to think so. If Ludwig Wehlitz cannot win love from her, why, indeed, should we expect at any time to see her wedded? Well, let the proud heart retain its solitude. Some of us, who are not proud, could whisper that the time comes when solitude becomes a presence, a spectre, that we could give all we have to exorcise."

Eleanora and Persis often engaged in this one-sided sparring. Secure of Eleanora's heart as she knew herself to be, Persis rarely took more part in it than to maintain her air of quiet attentiveness or now and then to interpose an ironic comment. She thought of Eleanora, indeed, as if she were another girl, but a more immature, more extravagant girl than she had ever felt herself to be, and, oddly enough, though she had far more respect for Eleanora's intelligence than for her mother's, she thought always of her mother as a being apart from these disputes, too old for them, and, in a sense, too wise for them. Her mother would never jeopardize a cause she had at heart by wrangling over it.

She vouchsafed no answer now to her foolish old friend, although she was feeling some anxiety. Lud-

wig must have sent her some message, and she could not but wonder what it might be.

"I don't believe Herr Wehlitz and Persis could have made each other happy, Eleanora," Mrs. Fennamy now took up with her complete dispassionateness. "He 's such an excitable man. Just see the way he behaved that day at tea over Graf von Lüdenstein's visit to us. Why, it made you feel as embarrassed as could be to see a man behave like that! And Persis, as you know well enough, is n't a bit the sort of girl to put up with things. I suppose you 've heard what she 's going to do for him. I don't see that he has any cause to complain. He is going to be a sort of son and brother to us and travel about with us. You 'd better come along, too, Eleanora—and little Herr Sachs, I suppose. We *shall* be a circus!"

"Yes. I have heard from Ludwig of the strange life that you have arranged for him," said Eleanora.

"I did n't arrange it, Eleanora. It was n't arranged for my convenience," said Mrs. Fennamy in mild disclaimer. "It 's not the sort of life I 'd have chosen for myself or for Persis. And it seems to me it 's doing a good deal for a man you 're not in love with. I was trying to explain it to Lady Frere this morning when she asked me what had happened—the pension is just as excited as can be about it all. I told her the whole thing quietly, and it made her look pretty dull and thick, as though I 'd put a batter pudding into her mouth and she could n't swallow it."

Despite herself, a sickly smile flickered for a mo-

ment on Eleanora's cheek at this picture of Lady Frere's speechless disapprobation. "The dolorous Philistine!" she exclaimed. "It will keep her quiet —the batter pudding! But what have the Philistines themselves to say against such an arrangement? Does it not do honour to all concerned?"

"Well, I 'm glad you can see it like that, Eleanora."

"And you, Persis," Eleanora now turned her gaze on the young girl—"What have you to say? You do not ask after Ludwig? Do you not wish to know if he has sent you any message?"

"Very much indeed, Eleanora," said Persis. "But since you gave none, I supposed that he must have written."

"No; he has not written. He cannot write," said Eleanora. "Nor will he speak of this again. But what he asks me to say to you is that he thanks you. 'Tell her'—these were his words—'tell her that we are worthy one of the other.' You should feel crowned, Persis, by such devotion."

"I am very glad indeed to hear that Ludwig understands mine," said Persis. She had finished her tea, and she presently got up and left them. It was then that Eleanora leaned forward to her friend and said in low tragic tones: "Had he been less generous, less unselfish, he would have won her! I warned him of it!"

"Now, what do you mean by that, Eleanora?" Mrs. Fennamy inquired, unfolding her work. "I do

wish you would n't take everything so hard. You see, they 're both perfectly satisfied."

"Perfectly satisfied. Both perfectly satisfied!" Eleanora repeated, while the tears came thickly to her eyes. She brushed her handkerchief over them. "Have I not seen him and read his despair and his humiliation? Do not pretend to misunderstand me! You know, I am sure, the terms in which he asked her hand."

"Well, but if he 'd asked in any other terms everything would have been over between them, would n't it? You know that Persis can't bear the idea of getting married. You know when she was only sixteen and we explained to her about things when she was getting worried, how she took it. And you remember how she said she agreed with every word Tolstoi said about it. Why, I could see perfectly well, when she told me about Herr Wehlitz, that it was just that that made her feel fondest of him."

"So you say! So she may think!" said Eleanora, still in her low tones and unwinding the scarf that was twisted round her neck. "But you do not deceive me into believing for one moment, Annetta, that you take seriously the first revolt of a young creature against the natural ordering of life."

"Well, no; I don't think I do take it very seriously —at all events, I should n't think it was to be reckoned with if the right man came along. Everything gets so simple when that happens. I was just like Persis myself," Mrs. Fennamy remarked, "and re-

fused lots of men and just hated them for having asked me; but the moment Christopher Fennamy came, I never gave all that another thought. So I do understand the way Persis feels."

Eleanora had gazed at her, still darkly, while she diagnosed the case, but now, putting out her hand, she took a cake and began to eat it. Mrs. Fennamy, without comment on this yielding, leaned forward at once to pour her out a cup of coffee. "You see, Eleanora, she is n't one speck in love with him; that 's the trouble," she said.

But Eleanora seemed to have received some inner sustainment. Her face had resumed its more normal expression of anxious, watchful hope.

"Persis's father, when he came to you, came as a wooer, did he not, Annetta?" she said, stirring her coffee. "That has been my poor Ludwig's great mistake. A woman does not know what she feels for a man until she has seen him as her wooer."

Mrs. Fennamy eyed her. "So you think he has n't given up hope, yet?" she asked.

"I do not say what I think, Annetta," Eleanora replied. "And, indeed, it may with truth be said that I think nothing. But I feel, I still feel, all is not yet at an end."

CHAPTER XVII

LUDWIG did not return for four days, and when he and Persis met again, in the little sitting-room, it was, on both sides, with a natural embarrassment. His, from his attempt to conceal it, was the more apparent, and she was almost disconcerted by the veil of artificiality he drew between them. She had felt her colour rise as she entered to welcome him, an unwonted tenderness filling her, and pity for his imagined pain; but she was met by no appeal and by no tenderness; by authority, rather, and a disciplinary terseness, as, turning at once from their hand-clasp, to the piled-up books, he said: "And now, to work."

A sense of depression fell upon Persis while she obediently took her place before him at the other side of the table. She could understand that his satisfaction with the situation was feigned, yet she wondered whether he were not feeling resentment against her, and whether, with it, there did not mingle a vein of relief. She was there, waiting, obedient, affianced to his cause. To have entered upon a reciprocated love-affair might well have been a cataclysm from which, however blissful, his fragile nerves had shrunk. He did not, however, look physically as fragile as when

they had parted. The mountain walks had browned his temples and his form was more erect. He seemed conscious of bravery in his acceptance of his defeat and there was a new emphasis in his ceremonial dignity, his military deliberation and alertness. All this she saw, finding it all slightly ridiculous, while at the same time she could not defend herself from feeling, at moments, a little in awe of the new Ludwig, the dark, austere man, who, with knitted brow and scrutinizing eye, looked at her from across the table and repeated, wringing at the end of his moustache, "You understand what I say, Persis?"

She did not, at first, understand; she seemed to understand less than before this strange interlude of phantasmal wooing; and sometimes when her mind groped in bewilderment among the fierce, flashing lights he threw about her, a half entranced Brunnhilde circled in flames, she suspected him of seeing her, mentally, at his feet. That was what he wanted of her, no doubt. The domain of romance had been denied to him, his claim now was the domain of the mind and he wished to show her that he could think as lightly of romance as she. He was to inform and she to acquiesce. Her mother's careful comments returned to her; it was acquiescence he asked, not judgment, and for the first days of reunion, abashed by his demeanour, in which she had expected to find signs of the avowed lover, she gave it somewhat helplessly. But it was only for the first days. She became aware, as the mists of embarrassment dissolved,

that though from a lover the oppression Ludwig exercised might have been tolerable, from a master it was not. With a sensation of almost physical growth, she grasped her resources and turned her thoughts from Ludwig to fix them upon what he showed her. These were strange objects. They seemed to her, as whole-heartedly at last she bent over them, sorting, matching, grouping, like the fragments of some splendid shattered mosaic, and she wondered how they could be made to fit together. That they did fit, that they did make one superb and inevitable pattern, was the implication of the commanding gesture with which he gave them to her. But now, seen by this impersonalised vision, she found it more and more difficult to conceive that the flashing surfaces, the facetted, fantastic outlines, could be united. She questioned him. He answered; and she would then continue to look at him, not, it must be evident to him, receiving light; meditating, rather, in her own. And before that unhostile, reflecting silence, she found that the acerbity, the vexation, with which Ludwig had received her queries, could drop suddenly to gentleness and even to appeal. She regained, with the old Ludwig, a new sense of her own power when she realised that her recovered poise shook his assumed one. He would lean across the table to expound his doctrine to her more technically and as he spoke he smiled at her, almost timidly. She could find no answer, now, enmeshed in filaments of scientific evidence, and her helplessness, if it was not acquiescence, was, she saw,

a balm to him. Yet he was watchful. He suspected her reticences.

When he left her at last, on these mornings, Persis often remained sitting for a long time motionless, her hands lying folded on the opened books, her eyes fixed on the little street seen through the lace curtains, with which she was always, so incongruously, to associate Ludwig's philosophy; and she would find that it was the accumulative power of his thought, rather than its gaps and weaknesses, that remained with her. It brooded over her like a strange, bright, dark cloud, changing the colour of the day, and at night her dreams were haunted by the rhythms of his sentences.

What was this life he showed her? Could she feel its triumph? Could he? Did not the hand of fate—blind, indifferent—strew dust not only upon the weak, those poor slaves whom Ludwig so despised, but upon the smiling, resplendent masters themselves? Was there not an unjustifiable optimism lurking in his tragic creed; for what, in such a world, shining, panoplied, heartless, was there to love and live for? It was as if, putting out hands to find a mother's breast, one met the brazen shield of some terrible warrior striding, cruel and laughing, through the universe. Persis had never yet felt that she put out her hands to anything; but now, as if before some peril, she shrank back and a strange new desolation knocked at her heart.

CHAPTER XVIII

SINCE the day when she had made him her promise in the sitting-room she had had hardly a glimpse of Herr Sachs, and she was glad one afternoon, while walking along the river-path, to see his figure approaching her. He was limping quickly, a bundle of books under his arm, and he came, no doubt, from Ludwig's hotel, for his own lodgings were in one of the smaller streets of the town, and were reached most quickly by the river. Persis was aware, as she watched him approach her, his eyes fixed before him on the ground, absorbed, no doubt, in thoughts in which she had no share, that she had a vague sense of grievance against Herr Sachs. It was very strange that a man who cared for her—and, however oddly, she had felt that he did care—should never have come to see her. The cat's discretion was almost discourteous. It was strange, too, that if he was fond of her he should not have warned her of peril in connection with Ludwig and his doctrines. Herr Sachs could not be in agreement with such doctrines.

She stood still under the trees, and as he did not look up until he was close upon her, the sight of her standing there evidently startled him very much. He stopped short; he uttered an exclamation; he blushed.

He was pleased, as well as startled; that, too, was evident.

Persis gave him her hand. "We are almost strangers, are we not?" she observed, smiling upon him. "It must be over a week since you told me that I was so young. Stop and talk to me for a little while. I am sure that you will feel that I have grown very old during these last days."

The smile had a touch of irony, but he answered it with his cheerfulness, saying, "I hope not, Fräulein; I hope not indeed."

"Are you busy? What are all those books?" she asked, as his pause expressed some uncertainty. "Can't you stop and talk?"

"I have just borrowed them from Ludwig, Fräulein. Yes, I am busy; I, too, am writing a book; did you know? But it will be very pleasant to sit with you here for a little while and to hear how old you have grown."

They sat down on the nearest bench under interlacing green boughs, and Sachs depositing his burden beside him leaned his crutch against it. It was fresh and still. In the vineyards on the opposite hill-side there were people working in the hot sunlight.

"I am very busy, too," said Persis. "All the morning I read and discuss with Ludwig, and for four or five hours in the afternoon I read to myself. Has Ludwig told you? You have seen, I hope, that I am not playing with his life." Her face expressed a slight vexation.

"Ah, Fräulein," said Sachs, taking off his round straw hat—which was too small for him—and mopping his forehead, "all that is past. We only think of happy things. I hear from Ludwig that you work admirably. I see that you give him great satisfaction."

"Do I?" she said vaguely. Her eyes were on the limpid flow of the river seen between the poplars. Some moments passed before she went on: "Will Ludwig approve of your book? Do you read it to him as you go on? You and he think very differently, don't you?"

"We think differently. Yes; it may be so. Ludwig says so, at all events," Herr Sachs replied after a little silence. "No; I do not read my book to him. It is a very simple little book."

"He would not like it?"

"I do not think he would. I do not put things as he likes to see them put. There are many different ways of putting things, are there not, Fräulein?"

"Not if they are the same things," said Persis with a rather dry laugh. "You don't care to say that you disagree with Ludwig. I see that."

Again, after a slight pause, Herr Sachs, still cheerfully, replied, "Yes. That is true. I do not."

"Why?" asked Persis.

She had turned her eyes to him. In the green shade of the trees and under the white shade of her hat, they were singularly brilliant eyes, emanating light, making, it might seem to a susceptible young

man who looked into them, darkness about them by their own radiance; not the eyes of German romanticism, lucid pools of receptive tenderness; ruthless, rather, like shining swords; almost baleful. Sachs blinked a little, screwing up the corner of his mouth, as if, indeed, he faced a dazzling object, and for a moment looked as if he were about to take refuge in a crow and thus evade discussion. But, suddenly, his face relaxed to gravity, and looking at her very earnestly he said: "It is affection that binds us, not theories. I have a great affection for Ludwig. I love him."

"I see," Persis looked gravely back at him. "Yes, of course I see. But if you, who love him, cannot think as he does, how much less can other people, who do not love him? It is a sad and a strange thing, is it not, that so few people should agree with Ludwig."

"It is usually the fate of pioneers, Fräulein."

"Is it that he frightens people too much?" Persis asked, dispassionately; "that he destroys everything they live by? Is that it?"

"Yes; when they listen long enough to understand, he frightens them," Sachs assented. "And they think that he only destroys."

"Do you not think so, too?"

"No; I do not think so, Fräulein." The faint grimace, half jocular, half evasive, again was on his face.

"But if all the things that people live by are illu-

sions? If might is the only right? If good is only the will of the strong, and the only evil that the weak should band together and pull down the strong? If life is so cruel and meaningless, what is there to live for? What is there that is not destroyed?"

She spoke without apparent urgency, as if rehearsing a well-learnt lesson, and Sachs replied in the same tone of impersonal research.

"The slave escapes the truth, does he not, Fräulein? In Ludwig's world its woe and emptiness would be borne by the conquerors, by those who saw the truth. It would not be such a cruel world as it seems; at the bottom, the obedient industrious hive, the many, automatically fulfilling the commands of those who guided and made use of them; they would have their human joys and sorrows unspoiled and all their hopes; at the top, the tormented few, finding new goals, new roads for life. There is truth in the vision, Fräulein."

"You think so, too, then!" Astonishment was in her voice; and something else. For the first time the young man heard it.

"Yes, I think so," he said. And he hesitated. "But it is not all the truth. You must not be like the others, Fräulein," he added, examining her: "You must not be frightened."

"I! I am not frightened!" Persis exclaimed. Her colour rose.

Troubled, but penetrating, his eyes continued to probe her. "Are you not, Fräulein? It sounded to me as if you were."

"If I am," said Persis, after another moment, "I did not know it. It was all too far away. It was like a curious, interesting picture he showed me. Now I see that he wants one step into the picture, and become part of it, and live in it. It is n't picture, it is reality, to him. Tell me; what am I to do if I am frightened?" The hot colour was still on her cheek, and it was so strange to her to find herself thus confessing to fear, thus appealing for help, that she felt the sting of tears rise to her eyes.

Herr Sachs, looking at her very gravely and kindly, said: "What are you to do, Fräulein? But if you become really frightened and do not feel strong enough, you must run away. It is not for the young to measure themselves against powers they cannot master. Ah, yes, Fräulein, for you are very young."

"But I am strong," said Persis. His quiet and his kindness helped her to recover herself. "I am one of Ludwig's strong people. I do not want to run away. I could not bear to run away."

"Then, if you feel yourself so strong—go forward. Do not listen to fear—not to your own fear nor to Ludwig's—for he is frightened too, how not? Listen to what he says. Accept what he says, yes, accept it. When we know how to accept, so much of Ludwig's thought is cleansing and purifying—like wind and fire. Go through the fire. We become chaff if we fly before it. We are steel when we have learned to endure and rejoice in it."

She sat looking at him. Fear was a wraith. She

felt strong enough to face anything when she looked at Herr Sachs and when his eyes became the benignant sky. But then, was it not because under that sky Ludwig's dark theories dissolved like wisps of cloud? And if Herr Sachs dissolved them, must it not be because he, too, saw them as wraiths?

A dim smile trembled on her lips and in her eyes, and, recognising some new and happy assurance in her, Sachs said: "You see, it will be well with you and with Ludwig. You are one of the brave who do not need to run away." He rose as he spoke, gathering up his books, smiling down at her. But Persis put her hand on his arm.

"Wait, only a moment. I am always asking you to wait! Yes. You make me remember. You make me think of so many things. All the beautiful things I have ever known. Tell me, you do not believe that there is no good and evil? that only strength is good?"

He had paused, looking down at her. And after a moment he said: "But yes, only strength is good."

"Cruel, mocking, destructive strength?"

"But is not that better than cruel, mocking, destructive weakness, Fräulein? There is hope for it, is there not? Think."

"But,—if it is all mechanism? If there is no freedom?"

"The word mechanism is meaningless when one speaks of human wills, Fräulein. Strength, what is it but choice, purpose, freedom? And what does

strength choose? What is the strongest thing that we know? Is it cruel? Look at it, Fräulein."

Persis had risen. "What is the strongest thing? Let me understand. Tell me what you mean."

"But, Fräulein, the strongest thing is love. Who is there in the world who seems to us so strong as the Christ?"

He read an almost ingenuous amazement in her eyes. "Christ? He died. He was crucified; broken."

"It is not weakness to die, Fräulein. He was not broken."

"You are a Christian! What Ludwig said was true!"

"Not as you mean the word; not as Ludwig means it. By the Christ I do not mean only the historic Jesus we read of."

"But you believe in goodness like that; in sacrifice; in selflessness; all the things that Ludwig hates."

"I hate them when they mean impotence and subterfuge, Fräulein. Goodness is what the highest strength desires and chooses. If only strength is good yet it is still more true to say that only goodness is strong. That is all my creed. And Fräulein Persis, see. When you understand Ludwig's creed you will find that it is not so different a one from mine. No. It is not. Whatever he may say."

There had been incredulity as well as amazement in her gaze, and he spoke almost with vehemence as

though in answer to it. She could not have believed, with all her knowledge of its significance, that Herr Sachs's face could be so changed. It spoke his meaning with even more authority than his words. Power, intentness, swiftness; she saw them bared suddenly in his glance, like a human form stripped of its clothing and standing in chiselled nakedness before one. And the analogy brought another as she looked at him. How much like trappings and tinsel, devices for covering, protecting, decorating some cowering human frame was much of Ludwig's strength. The thought made her grave. By the light of Herr Sachs's reality, she had seen a truth that he himself would never willingly have shown her.

They walked now along the path towards the pension garden. And for a little while they both kept silence. It was Persis who broke it. "Why do you not come any longer to our discussions, and study with us?" she asked suddenly.

He had walked, absorbed, his eyes on the ground, and he looked up in surprise. "I have my own studies, Fräulein," he said after a moment.

"Would they have interfered? You came at first. Did Ludwig want you not to come?"

"You are his pupil, Fräulein. He wants you to himself. Under all the circumstances I find that very natural."

"I suppose it is natural. But it would have been more helpful, I think, if we could all have talked together, searched for the truth together."

"Ludwig is not searching for the truth with you. He is showing you his own truth."

She looked at him rather as if he had placed a high wall across her path, which, gauging its height, she abandoned any idea of scaling, and since they had now reached the garden she mounted the stone steps and drew the grille behind her and her young face, potent, smiling, faintly challenging, looked at him from between the bars. "Is your mother alive?" she asked.

"My mother!" Sachs looked back at her in astonishment.

"Yes. Is she alive?"

"She is alive. Why do you ask, Fräulein?"

"Where does she live? I wanted to know."

"In Leipsig, Fräulein, where I was born."

"And your father?"

"He died many years ago."

"So that your mother brought you up?"

"She brought us up, all eight of us," said Sachs. "She keeps a boarding-house for students. It is a hard life."

"And she is very unselfish, very self-sacrificing, very unresisting?"

"You would not call her very unresisting," Sachs answered, smiling. "She has a high temper, the *Mütterchen*. But, yes, she is unselfish, devoted, the best of mothers."

"You love her very much?"

"Very much indeed," Sachs now had begun to

laugh. "Is it a game, Fräulein? I think you are in a mischievous mood after all our grave talk."

"No; it is n't a game. I wanted to know where she lived and whether you loved her. May I sometimes send your mother a little gift, do you think—as a friend of yours?—She would not mind?"

"But it would be too good of you, Fräulein. It would be a great surprise and a great pleasure to her." He looked very boyish; touched, amazed, delighted. He was full, she saw, of a boyish capacity for enjoying little things and, at the moment, she felt herself his senior.

"I should like to please your mother because that would please you," she said. "And I feel I should like her because I like you so much. We will talk about it, about what gift it shall be. Now you must go and write your book.—Good-bye."

CHAPTER XIX

SHE had a note from Wehlitz next morning postponing their lesson until the afternoon as he had important proofs to correct. It read rather tersely, but terseness, now, was his garment; and when the afternoon came and she was told that he was in the garden waiting for her, it was a happy mood she brought him. For she had her talisman; he was not to frighten her and she was to help him; she was to be steel, not chaff.

The day was beautiful. As she went down the path she paused to look at an apple-bough, clustered thickly with apples, and making her think of some picture she had seen—a long hand reaching up to seize a rosy fruit. She could recall the subtle drawing, the warm white of the flesh on its background of sky and leaves, the supple turn of the wrist and the narrow nails; some primitive Italian painting it must have been. Looking down from the branch, she saw that Wehlitz was standing watching her at some little distance and she read in his attitude, in the brooding poise of the head, some disapprobation of her loitering. She still paused, however, reaching up her own hand, picking an apple from its stem and setting her teeth in it, and as she did so she called to him:

"Good-morning. The apples are ripe. Shall I bring you one?"

"No, I thank you," Wehlitz, from his station, replied.

Persis ran forward now, taking another bite at her apple, a radiant, confident young figure, her white skirts sweeping the grass, the sunlight dappling her hair and shoulders. But Wehlitz, as she joined him, hardly replied to her second greeting, setting the books very carefully one upon the other on the tin table and evading her glance. "Would it trouble you too much," he inquired, "if I ask you for a glass of *sirop?* I am loath to disturb you, but it is oppressive to-day, and I am thirsty." The artificiality of his tone matched his meticulous gestures.

Persis had stopped short before him, examining him with curiosity. "Certainly;" she answered, after the scrutinizing pause. There was an ironical note in her voice, but it concealed bewilderment and even hurt. She turned away and walked slowly back to the house. He was still occupied with the placing of the books and papers when she returned. "I thank you," he repeated.

She took her place at the table.

"Before we begin," said Ludwig, folding and unfolding a paper and glancing down it with a feint of carelessness, "I should like to give you a word of counsel, of friendly advice. My friend Conrad Sachs is a busy man, a cruelly driven man. He has his own support to provide, and that of his aged mother. It

is most important for him that his work should not be interrupted. I went to his lodgings yesterday, almost immediately after he had left me, at a time when he had told me that he was to be at work, and there I waited for over an hour, yes, it was over an hour by my watch. He said, when at last he came, and he was evidently preoccupied and excited, in no fit frame of mind for study, he said that he had met you and had been talking with you. It is a woman's place, Persis, to carry the man's shield, to buckle it upon his breast, to bind his wounds. When she enmeshes him in idleness and frivolity she does him the greatest of injuries."

After this speech there was a pause. Wehlitz had kept his eyes fixed on his papers and Persis, leaning lightly back in her chair with folded arms and bent head, had looked at him with grave attention. "Is his mother an aged woman?" she asked presently.

With half incredulous amazement his eyes fixed themselves upon her. "His mother?"

"Yes, Herr Sachs's mother. He is quite a young man, not so many years older than I am. I should never think of calling my mother aged." She stressed the syllable as he had done.

For some moments of silent interchange, while he paled and flushed, Wehlitz said nothing; then, with ponderous dignity, he answered: "I am unable to inform you of Frau Sachs's age."

"When you said she was an aged woman it was

only, then, because you wanted to add a pathetic touch to the picture you were drawing."

Wehlitz's nostrils dilated and he drew deep breaths. "You mock me, Persis?"

"I think I do," she conceded, but without playfulness.

"Ah, very well," said Wehlitz after another pause, "Very well. I understand. You are tired of me and I will relieve you of my presence. Permit me, however, to observe before I depart, that I should not have exposed myself to the flouts of a vain, spoiled child had I not misread her character." While he spoke he gathered up the papers, and his hands trembled.

To Persis, though she sat with her head bent, her eyes turned away from him, all the symptoms of his discomposure were evident, and that she betrayed none of her own was a sustaining fact. But though she, too, felt dismay, she was determined to yield at no point to his folly.

He buckled a strap about the books, folded the papers into a portfolio, took up his hat and placed it upon his head. Then he paused, and she knew that his eyes were resting on her. She did not raise her glance to his. As if with a certain precaution, then, he took his hat off and laid it softly back upon the table. Then standing still he looked at her intently.

Something in this last gesture and in this last stillness struck upon her sense of pity and of mirth. He was like a reproved and sulky dog who dares not call attention to himself, yet watches carefully for signs

of relenting on his master's face. She looked up and a glint of laughter was in her glance.

Tears of fury, of shame, of relief mounted to Wehlitz's eyes. "You will let me go like this, then! You have no word to say!" he cried, clutching and unclutching his hands on the back of his chair.

"What can I say?" she returned soberly. She felt no feminine desire for a retaliatory quotation of his "vain, spoiled child"—though that he seemed to her. She expressed, indeed, with sincerity, her sense of helplessness. "Of course I do not want you to go," she added.

"You do not want me to go! You say that you do not want me to go! Yet you will not deny that you flout me!"

"I don't deny that I find you absurd."

Her sobriety, her maturity, at once scattered his faculties and concentrated his grief. "Absurd! My solicitude for my friend is called absurd! I am not accustomed to such accusations! I am not accustomed to being treated with disrespect!"

"You certainly seem to me absurd," Persis reiterated. "In what way do I impede Herr Sachs more in talking to him about all our theories than you did when you had him with us in those first days?" It was weak perhaps to descend to such queries, but she was really curious to discover the basis of his grievance.

"There is a time for all things! Those were holidays for Conrad! They are over now! He must

work! He must work!" Wehlitz almost sobbed, the most singular commotion on his face. "What need have you to discuss our theories with him? Am I not your master? Have you not promised your allegiance to me? It is to me you should come with your perplexities. Conrad does not recognize and could not understand the world we live in—you and I. I do not discuss my beliefs with Conrad. I would not have discussed them with you had I known that you would take them to Conrad for his inspection and criticism."

The paltry, piteous truth was evident. It was no personal jealousy; for that her heart could have softened. It was a jealousy of the mind. She saw him as puerile, fiercely egotistic.

The maid, at this moment, most inopportunely, brought the *sirop* in its red and white glass, and after looking at it unseeingly for a moment, Wehlitz filled the glass with water from the carafe and drank the beverage hastily. Then, pushing aside the tray, he again fixed his insistent, accusatory, yet supplicating eyes upon her. She could not restrain her irony.

"It was not for Conrad, then, your solicitude. It was for your own position."

A violent red mounted to Wehlitz's cheek. "False! False!" he cried, panting, while he dashed his fist down upon the table. "You have a serpent's tongue! You seek to sting and wound me! It is the woman's nature! I resent—rightly—your seeking out my friend to criticize me with him behind my back! It

is not loyal! It is not loving! I trusted in your loyalty—yes, and in your love. Have you not promised them? If you disagreed with me I believed that you would come to me openly, frankly, like a comrade."

"So I do," said Persis coldly. "So I intend to do—always. I do not criticize you with Herr Sachs."

"No? You do not? What then? What did you say with him?"

"Did he not tell you?"

"I did not ask. I did not stoop to ask. I expressed my anxiety—my disapproval—and I left him. I did not hear, nor choose to hear from him, what you had said of me."

"And you will not hear it from me," said Persis.

Again a silence fell. Wehlitz walked up and down, his hands clutched together behind him. Persis fixed her eyes moodily upon the ground. Presently he stopped before her, and she knew before he spoke that it was surrender she was to hear, veiling itself in authority. "Tell me this," he said, "may I count upon your loyalty—your common loyalty? May I trust you not to say behind my back what you would not say to my face? Answer me."

She did not raise her eyes. Moodily she still gazed down at the grass.

"What!" he cried, and tears quivered in his voice. "You cannot give me this assurance! I may not trust you even so far?"

She raised her eyes to him at last and he read in

them pride rather than reluctance. "I must have complete independence."

"Independence? What do you mean by independence?" Wehlitz asked, leaning heavily on the back of his chair with both hands while he stared back at her.

"Between friends there cannot be such promises. I must be free to talk to anybody I like and of anything I choose, and you must, if we are friends, trust my loyalty."

He gazed at her. It was now all surrender she saw; authority had fallen away completely. "Then we are reconciled?"

"Reconciled," she agreed.

"You forgive any offensive expressions that, in my excitement, may have escaped me?"

"I shall not think of them again," she dimly smiled.

He sought a little to recover himself. "As I forgive you for yours."

And with all good humour, Persis echoed: "As you forgive me for mine."

Wehlitz took his place at the table. "And now to work—to work," he said. Persis sat ready while he turned the pages of a book. But suddenly he put his elbows on the table and rested his forehead in his hands.

"I am afraid that you feel ill," said Persis after a moment.

"Yes," he said, his face hidden. "I feel ill. Yes, I am not well." And he added, after another silence,

"I have over-excited myself. I cannot think fruitfully to-day. Forgive me. I must go." He rose.

With the grave solicitude that was her nearest approach to tenderness, she helped him to put together his books and papers. "I am so sorry," she said. "You will go and rest, won't you?"

"Yes, I will go and rest." He spoke as though he were on the verge of tears. She was indeed very sorry, but disturbed, too, and perplexed; for he seemed to her like a child, and a child one could not caress and soothe—if such ministrations had been natural to her. He gave her, indeed, no time for further expressions of sympathy. Smiling with constraint, avoiding her eyes, he lifted his hat and turned away. He went out by the grille, and as he came to it and opened it, he paused for a moment, as though struck by a sudden thought, and looked back at her. She felt sure that he was wondering if it were here that she and Herr Sachs had met.

CHAPTER XX

PERSIS sat on under the apple-boughs. She watched a ladybird wander distractedly on her sleeve and stooped presently to pick a long blade of grass on to which, with some difficulty, she succeeded in cajoling it. Then she rose and placed the grass on a branch. As she thus secured the ladybird, she heard footsteps approaching down the path, and, looking round, saw Graf von Lüdenstein before her.

She had wondered, once or twice, and with a curious sense of relief and disappointment, whether he had gone away and, hearing nothing of him, she had almost accepted the fact of his disappearance from her life. Now, meeting the sleepy yet intent eyes, she was aware that the sight of him was reviving, exhilarating like a draught of light yet potent wine. This man, at all events, would not weary or exasperate her. Nor should he discompose her; this was the second thought that came as, with the sense of weight in his glance, memories of their last meeting strongly returned to her.

He was looking grave. It struck her, as they greeted, that it was the first time he had looked at her unsmiling. Glancing down at the books upon the table, he said: "Do I interrupt? Am I permitted? I have been away. I only returned last night."

She assented, and he sat down on the other side of the table in Ludwig's chair, taking off his hat and laying it down while he glanced away from her and up at the branches, drawing in the air with the appearance of satisfaction she remembered to have noticed in him when she had met him on that momentous morning on the river-path. He was, indeed, satisfaction personified. She was able, while his eyes were thus turned from her, to appraise his face as she had not done before. The chin was hidden by the square gold beard, but the moustache, brushed up from them, revealed the lips, calm, sensual, resolute, as if always slightly smiling, even when the face was grave, as now; not a bad mouth, nor a bad face, with its thick yet handsome nose and placid brow; kind even, though certainly callous; full of character, too, though—was it not?—unscrupulous. His eyes met hers as they rested on him with their impersonal scrutiny, and now he vaguely smiled. "I was wrong the other day, it seems, Fräulein," he observed. "I hope you have forgiven me for my blunder."

His words brought another memory to her mind. She paused for a moment before saying: "Was it a blunder?"

Lüdenstein raised his eyebrows slightly, considering her. "Was it a blunder?"

"You really thought Herr Sachs had come for that?"

"Why not?" he asked. "Who has suggested otherwise?"

"No one," said Persis somewhat hastily. "I only wondered. It was such an incredibly foolish idea of Ludwig's. He could hardly have taken it seriously himself—and it seemed that you did."

He looked at her thoughtfully. "I did not take it seriously until I heard that Sachs had come with a message for you. I thought it the only explanation of that. Ludwig had given me no hint of his hopes, and it could not have occurred to me that he would confide their expression to another man. No, I confess the reality would have seemed to me even less of a serious possibility than what I had imagined to be the truth."

She felt her colour rising. He made her angry, if not with him; her anger seemed a diffused feeling applicable to no one person, and centreing only in the suspicion that an indignity had been done her and that he reminded her of it. "Yes, I see—yes, it was no doubt natural for you to have thought it," she murmured.

Lüdenstein was silent for some moments, with no air of resentment, though evidently her implied accusation still preoccupied him. After a little while he said: "You were wise in refusing Ludwig, Fräulein. He is a man to whom one can devote oneself, but not a man whom one should marry. And this situation that you have made for him is an admirable device." And looking now down at her books, as if he turned from a theme too delicate for his intrusion, he went on: "You have been studying? You

plunge seriously, resolutely, into all our direful problems?"

"Are they your problems, too?" She wondered if it should not have been hers to open this new conversational path; she took it with some relief, though again with a little sting of anger at the thought that he always was the initiator; her only part seemed to be to follow or to resist.

"I should not, perhaps, say ours," said Lüdenstein. "I have myself made up my mind as to which problems are insoluble. That is a great convenience, and lightens one's mental baggage very considerably. With my own little handful of solutions I exist very comfortably; a dressing-case, if you will, rather than a box. I find a dressing-case all that I require for this journey of life."

She felt that she would like to know what the dressing-case contained. "Are your solutions the same as Ludwig's?" she inquired.

"Ludwig?" he repeated. "Has Ludwig solutions? I was not aware of any. He finds premises, it is true, and draws conclusions. The premises I often accept; the conclusions seldom. I am not a poet. I am an old-fashioned hedonist and a new-fashioned materialist, and that is what Ludwig would be if he logically followed the premises he finds. Luckily for us he is not a logician and gives us art instead of systems. All the beauty in the world is made by the people who are incapable of logic. Ludwig has his boxful of labels, like the rest of them—his

higher, his lower, his base, his noble, his peaks and his morasses. It is an idealism, a frantic idealism, that spurns the metaphysical basis of idealism."

"We must all use labels if we are to speak together at all," Persis demurred. Oddly, while to Sachs she could point out her difficulties, from Lüdenstein she wished to hide that she saw any. "You, as a hedonist, would call higher that which pleases you most."

"Not at all," said Lüdenstein, laughing. "Not at all, *gnädiges Fräulein.* I should not call it lower either: but simply, that which pleases me." He moved, now, the book beneath his elbow and opened it, glancing down its pages and murmuring here and there a phrase of comment. "Hm! Say you so, my friend? Brave fellow! So dies the Chimæra!"

He affected her with a strong curiosity as he sat there looking down; the book was not one of Ludwig's, it was written by a young scientist, and expounded a mathematical cosmogony.

What did he live by, this strange man? What did he believe in? And why did he trouble to seek her out and impart to her his indifferences? For, after all, though she thought of herself as a powerful young person, she did not expect a man of his type to find her so.

Suddenly, as if he had felt her questions, he looked up and their eyes met. For a moment, without words, they looked steadily at each other. Then, slowly, as if coming to some decision, weighing its timeliness, he said: "Fräulein Fennamy, you see before you a man

who has no consolations. I believe in Ludwig's higher man as little as I believe in friend Sachs's metaphysical mythologies. I believe in alien and indifferent forces—call them material or mental, as you will—which have produced us, which grind out their destiny through us, which destroy us and our small schemes and standards as relentlessly as they call us into life. I am not an unhappy man, for I expect nothing from any Gods, and in frustrated expectation lies our misery. But, though I have no complaint to make or aspiration to express, I am, perhaps, in my acceptance of our singular human situation, no less worthy of interest than our two illuminated friends. I, too, can suffer, though I have, it may be, more power of enduring and controlling suffering; and I, too, can desire and hope. My life is not so arid as it may seem to your young eyes. There remain in our world, sinister as it is, potent draughts of intoxication even for the man who has seen through its illusions. There remain the intoxication of beauty,—I drink deep of mine in music,—and the intoxication of love."

She knew now, suddenly, though—ominously, was it not?—without surprise, that behind all his careful words had been an intention, an intention directed towards herself. And, for a moment, while the realization laid hold upon her, she sat as helpless as a bird in a snare, gazing at him and maintaining the appearance, only, of fearlessness.

Lüdenstein seemed unaware of any advantage. It was in the same tone, thoughtful, deliberate, that he

went on, looking quietly at her. "Of that I have often drunk. But never has the magic more strongly come to me than now; I do not need to tell you so, you know already your power over me. You know that I love you, Fräulein Persis."

His eyes rested steadily on her, without embarrassment, without appeal, and, it almost seemed, without ardour. It was in the weight of their regard, pressing down upon her like the slumberous heat of a sultry day, that she felt passion, watchful, imperious, armed with a maturity of experience and resource. And as she sat gazing at him with her pale, brilliant eyes, Lüdenstein slightly smiled. "So. It is well. You are not of the vulgar brood," he said. "You are not affronted. You are grave and haughty and beautiful, as I have always found you, neither fearing me nor stooping to reprove. So. My confession is made. From the first moment that I saw you, moving towards us under the linden trees, stepping so proudly, like a noble child, in your dress of black and white and with your green ribbons, I have been intoxicated."

What came to her now was more bewildering than fear—or was it but another form of fear? Antagonism, curiosity, delight; they were his words. And the first added only a charm to the others. She did not dislike him. She felt no affront. She was not angry. For he showed her—there was his power—that in listening to him she lost no dignity in his eyes. More than that; she received the ambiguous

assurance that were she to yield to him, even unloving, she would gain rather than lose in his esteem. Yield? The word, re-echoing back, incredibly, upon her, brought a sudden shock of blood to her cheeks. For the first time in her young experience she, who had contemplated much of the forbidden fruit of life, untempted, scornful of its meretricious gloss and glow, felt the charm that may lie in temptation, felt the impulse of Eve, the impulse to put out her hand—to touch, if not to pluck. She could never pluck; never, never; so her pounding heart reiterated; yet a siren cry, resonant, haunting, as if from the shores of the most ancient world, rang in her ears. She had the vision of the Lucretian Venus, implacable, serene. And, amazed, incredulous, she saw that it was she herself, Persis, who listened to the cry. The thought of herself as listening to sirens, of herself as yielding to the unhallowed passion of a man she did not love, was so monstrous that she was able to dismiss it, a nightmare that had crossed the stately order of her dreams. The blush still dyed her cheeks, but she had mastered her voice and gaze as she answered: "I am not affronted; but I do not love you."

Lüdenstein smiled. "But of course you do not love me. And you have almost disliked me. I saw it; and perhaps I am dislikable. That does not mean unlovable, be it said."

"I do not dislike you."

"Yet you are not indifferent to me?"

She was silent at this for a moment. The qualm of

the disavowed nightmare was still in her blood. "That may be only because of your feeling for me."

"Ah, precisely. And that is all I ask. That my feeling should determine yours."

"What do you mean? I do not understand you," she said. She spoke haughtily, challenging herself; for this was only to put out her hand, to touch the fruit, to examine it with a mingling of repulsion and delight.

She heard the slow smile in his voice, for her eyes were downcast. "Since you do not play the part of the affronted simpleton, Fräulein, I will be frank with you and tell you that what I hope for, what I desire to make possible by the power and persistence of my feeling, is that we shall one day share the intoxication of love. No, I see it, you will not pretend to be insulted. From a man like me, who laughs at laws and customs, it is no insult."

She knew that it was not. She, too, knew no other law than her own taste, her own standard of fitness and harmony. And she did not love this man, so that she was in need of no conventional barriers.

"So, since you understand, you will continue to let me see you," Lüdenstein added.

"You will not speak of this again?" Persis asked.

She did not wish him to speak of it, that was true; yet beyond the stipulation was the desire to feel his feeling, to know it there, held in check by her will, offering, in silence, its ambiguous homage.

"I cannot promise that," said Lüdenstein, after a moment. "But I am wise and tactful. I will not displease you, that I can promise; nor inconvenience you." And he added, watching her narrowly, "Others shall not guess. That would be to inconvenience you, would it not?"

She kept her eyes on his. "You will not imagine that I am consenting to a clandestine flirtation. I accept nothing from you. I only do not send you away because I am not a simpleton; because I understand that from you it is not an insult."

He was, she saw, at once charmed and amused by her haughty candour. He leaned across the table and put a finger-tip on her hand. "And you will not think me so stupid as not to understand why you do not send me away."

He understood. Perhaps better than she herself did. She felt the pressure of that kindly, half ironic comprehension in him, as of one who has seen round and through the scruples and qualified acceptances of many women. To see him so content frightened her again, a little. But the sound of her own words had fortified her. He might see further in one direction than she did, in another he did not see so far; he could not really understand the tastes and standards of a woman like herself. He thought he read her strength; he read only her weakness; secure in the one, she could admit the other. This was a conviction to part on. She rose, putting back her chair. Then, when he, too, had risen, she paused. "You say that

you are Ludwig's friend. How does what you have told me agree with your loyalty to Ludwig?"

"But my dear young lady, how not?" said Lüdenstein, smiling with assurance. "Ludwig has accepted your verdict. The field is free for other aspirants."

"Has he accepted it?"

"Has he not?"

"I have no reason to think that Ludwig does not still hope. I have every reason to think that he does."

Lüdenstein considered her. "It is then for you to say whether you find the hope so justified that you must send me away. For my own part"—his tone changed—"I believe that you are as far from loving Ludwig as you are from loving me; perhaps further."

"I do love him," said Persis. "I love him very much. Of you I can only say that I do not dislike you."

"Ah, that love! I should prefer your dislike!" Lüdenstein smiled, slowly shaking in the air his open hand. "No, I confess I should have no hope of a woman who loved me in that fashion. Therefore I feel no disloyalty towards Ludwig."

She gathered up her books in silence, turning to the path, and Lüdenstein walked beside her. They had spoken almost in the tone of challenge and retort. She was thinking now of Ludwig. If he still had hope, why did he not make it manifest and protect her from this experience upon which she was venturing? Had he been a lover worthy of the name,

Lüdenstein could never have come to her with his avowal. A dart of her mother's irony mingled with deeper bitterness towards Ludwig. At the foot of the steps, she bade Lüdenstein a cool farewell and left him.

She passed through the salon, unaware of the eyes lifted upon her from the table and sofa and easy-chairs, and went to her room. Dusk was falling and by the line of light under her mother's door she saw that she had come from her bath and was dressing for dinner.

From the earliest days of her childhood she had always associated her mother with the delicate and evasive perfume of violet powder; and standing now outside her door in the dark little passage, her hand still laid on the stair-rail, there rushed upon her a sensation of fear and helplessness made up of all the atavistic associations that clustered, like the impalpable mist shaken from her mother's powder-puff, about the old familiar scent. It was as if everything that her mother instinctively embodied and stood for, as if generations of Ashleyville, unaware of the Lucretian Venus and of any but the world of law and bondage, spoke suddenly in her, or to her, demolishing the fabric of her education and telling her in staid, ingenuous terms that it was wicked to allow a married man to make love to you and perilous to keep the secret of any temptation from your mother. And in reply to all the self-justifications and securities of the afternoon she seemed to hear her mother's voice,

speaking for the generations of Ashleyville and saying: "Why, Persis, you 're a bad girl."

She stood there in the dusk, lightly poised, hovering, drawing swift, shallow breaths, and the impulse to go in to her mother, tell her all, ask her for advice, was so strong that she felt it pass in a tingling thrill through her muscles and sway her towards her mother's door. Then astonishment checked it, and the realization of its absurdity. She could see so clearly the powder-puff in its silver box and, turned to her above it, the trite little face that was like the powder-puff in its lightness and conventionality. What an absurd person, indeed, of whom to seek counsel! With the ironic perception of reality came a restoring consciousness of her own resource, detachment and significance. She did not need to ask counsel. There was nothing to be afraid of; there was exhilaration, but no peril, in this new experience. If she still breathed quickly as she tip-toed into her own room, that was, she told herself, because, after all, she was young and not accustomed to such experiences.

CHAPTER XXI

WEHLITZ, when he came next morning, had a large parcel of proofs under his arm. It was raining and Persis awaited him in the little sitting-room, recognizing at once in his demeanour the mingling of resolution and uncertainty. He, less discerning she felt sure, would not read the excitement and anxiety that had run in her veins since her interview with Lüdenstein. She was not aware that she cloaked them by an emphasized kindliness.

Wehlitz unfolded his parcel and drew from it the long rolls of proof-sheets, glancing up at her swiftly from under his brows as he did so with a scrutiny at once fierce and wistful. This was the great prose poem he had so often spoken of and it was evident to her, touchingly so, that by this demonstration of his genius he hoped to efface the memory of their dispute and to bind her to him anew.

"Yes, Persis," he said, "the time has come when we must share all. I had not felt sure, till now, of your readiness. It needs a strong brain and a heart that knows no tremors to listen to this lion-voice. That you are strong, yes, disciplined already for one so young, is evident to me. Together we will go over these final proofs."

Ludwig, really, had never touched her more than this morning when his hurried sentences revealed the pathos and artificiality of the situation. Not thus should he have brought his sheaves and laid them at her feet. Fear and distrust mingled with his homage and the trophy was displayed more in threat or appeal than as an offering. "I am so glad," she said. "I felt that I should not really understand you until I had heard it."

"True," said Ludwig. "Those who have not heard or who, hearing, have been deaf to my meaning, are strangers to me. I will read to you. I will sit here and you there so that I may see your face. So. With your chair a little more turned to the light, Persis."

Wehlitz had a deep resonant voice and when he read aloud it lost the fever and fretfulness with which the turmoil of daily life so often edged it. His own works he read with an impassioned gravity. He plunged her, with the opening stanza into a realm of uncanny brightness and she felt a hypnotic quality in his rapid, chanting, exulting utterance. She seemed at first to hear only the rhythm of the sentences. They were arabesques of running light upon the brightness and made her dizzy. Only after a little time had passed could she grasp what they were saying, and, as their meaning came, a new realization of alarm, almost of distress, rose within her. It was magical and sinister, this poem of Ludwig's, full of splendour and menace; with exquisite and nimble foot-

steps it ran and danced and leaped over graves and waves and altars, and always in an uncanny light like that of a baleful, beautiful star. And it was Ludwig who had made this marvellous thing, the Ludwig whom she pitied and flouted and wondered at. Her distress was for the sense of incompatibility; for why, since his work was so great, was he not greater? Her alarm was for the greatness divined. Was such greatness to be held by her? Did she hold it? Would not such a shaft of blinding light pierce to the bottom of her confused heart and read the discords there? But if it could so pierce—her quick thoughts wove themselves into the glancing pattern of the poem—it must win her. She had done no wrong. If she drifted, it was because he did not put forth greatness and hold her. It was not enough to show his greatness to her, like a picture; he must be it, too. He must claim her, hold her and she would never drift again.

So for a moment her new fear of unworthiness gave him a new glamour in her eyes.

When he had finished the chapter he looked up to find her eyes dwelling on him; and very deeply they seemed to dwell.

"You care for it, Persis?" he asked, and in a voice that trembled.

Her voice, too, trembled as she answered him. "It is beautiful; it is wonderful."

To see the homage of her gaze intoxicated him. "Ah," he said with a laugh almost wild, "I shall

write now. All will now be well with me. It is as I had hoped and believed when I first met you. Your presence will banish the phantoms. For I have had arid times, Persis; times with no life, no thought; dull welterings of gloom and doubt—not of my truth, no, never of my truth; that is there, above me, secure, triumphant; but of myself, of power to seize and make it manifest—the bright, the terrible truth. Yes—yes—yes, all will now be well."

He had leaned forward across the table and she had given her hands into his; but it was as if unseeingly that he pressed them, not looking at her as he went on; "You feel it and you will understand it. Later. This is but the beginning. Later you will see and accept it all. For life says even to the most dread vision! So be it. So I will it.—Even the nightmare life can clasp and smile upon as a bride."

"What nightmare do you speak of, Ludwig?" she asked. His heavy yet exalted gaze dwelt on nothingness. She wished that he would look at her.

But though he turned his eyes on her now it was for a moment only. "What nightmare?" he repeated. "Have I not told you?"

"There are so many that we must face," said Persis. She was not thinking of nightmares, but of him.

He considered her again. "The eternal return of all things; cycle upon cycle of life repeating itself with mathematical exactitude through immeasurable time. For an infinite universe such repetition is a necessity. That is what I mean. Is it not manifest in all I write?

I must make it manifest. My life depends upon it. It is on my truth that I take my stand against all the dealers in sops and soporifics. The sharp, the bright, the cutting truth for me. And for you, Persis; for you. *Nicht wahr?* We will play with the swords, you and I, we will toss them in our hands, unharmed, and dance between them and see, unmoved, others fall among them, gashed and bleeding."

He spoke to her, but he seemed to have forgotten her, lifting his hands from hers, rising, putting back his chair to pace up and down the room. She remembered now the conception of which he spoke. It had remained for her a picture looked at, not felt. She had found no horror in it. The swing through space and time, as of a vast pendulum that was to bring her back again and again, the selfsame Persis, affected her imagination like the vision of a Flying Victory, ominous yet glorious, with wings outspread in endless flight. But as he spoke now, in his voice a mingled ecstasy and dread as of the moth that circles round the fatal light, she felt the infection of his fear rise dimly in her. She saw it like a mildew running over the glancing blade that he had put into her hands; that blade, that exalting, aspiring life, cruel, yet with love for a higher than itself at the heart of its cruelty; that cry to endless self-transcendence, what had it to do with this suffocating destiny? To ask the question, to think intently, to find answers, was to burnish the blade anew, to free herself from the infection. And as some time had passed and as Ludwig still paced the

room, she said: "But your poem is above all theories. Why trouble about theories?"

He stopped short. He was behind her and she heard his hurried, difficult breathing. "Theory? It is not theory. It is truth. It is necessity—no mere illustration or simile."

"Whose necessity?" Persis asked again after another moment.

"Ours, ours, ours," said Ludwig: "our will. It is so. It must be so. For there is no other will than ours." He had continued to stand behind her chair, but now, coming round the table, he confronted her, bending his strangely lighted eyes upon her. "I know it, Persis," he said. "I, alone, perhaps, of all men, know it, and with a knowledge deeper than any demonstration can bring. It came to me. Listen. I will tell you." He drew his chair close to hers and leaned his face to hers, looking into her eyes. "It was in the high Alps, among the peaks, the snowy solitudes, sublime and awful. The dread initiation came. I was alone. Men were forgotten, below me in the valleys. Above me was the empty sky. And with my hand I felt the texture of reality; with my eyes I saw its face; my breath mingled with its icy, sunny breath. It was the mystic's rapture that I knew; but my abyss, my height, was a deeper, a higher one than any of the hosts of the self-suggested have ever plumbed or scaled. They come with their yearning and the abyss echoes back to them the vast reverberation of their feeble sighs. But I came without yearn-

ing, I came all a challenge and a readiness. For ever and ever, and again and again, the wheel will turn and turn. Such is our immortality. Such the love of life that urges us ever forward until the circle is complete. There is no escape. There is no transcendence. For ever we shall return and changelessly be ourselves again. And deeper than the dread is the acceptance, the acceptance that is life. Yes; for the gaze of the true psychologist there is truth in the immediacy that the mystics find; for they, too, dread, and they, too, accept, though it is their own self-love that they find again the immense mirage of absolute love where they are lost yet found. It is our heart-beat, that acceptance. I heard it. I alone have heard it. For days, for three days, I was as one distraught. I ran and leapt among the snow-fields. I had no food. I cannot think I slept. I was at one with life. I was baptised to the spirit. It was a rapture of joy and horror."

All the time that he had been speaking their eyes had met, but now he leaned his head on his hands, covering his face. Persis sat looking at him. He had become wraith-like to her; she was wraith-like to herself and, venturing a glance, almost cautious, down at her folded hands and around the room, the prosaic little room, she found that all objects had endued themselves with this spectral unreality. His message in its immediacy had wrought with the inevitable power of all immediacy upon her, so that she, too, partook of his conversion, she, too, knew the uncanny

baptism, to horror and darkness, not to peace and light. But, as yet, she did not know how profoundly he had moved her. She was able, after a moment, to grasp at the seeming reality that surrounded her and to say, though in a voice strange to herself, looking back at his bent head. "You are tired, Ludwig. I am afraid that you are very tired."

The irrelevancy and inappropriateness of this remark did not seem to strike him. He answered vaguely after a moment. "Tired? I am always tired."

"Dear Ludwig, I am so sorry," she said. Her voice was gentle, remote, contemplative.

Wehlitz rubbed his hands across his brows, dropped them and met her eyes with a vague, dazed smile. "I am always tired," he repeated. "Life to me is endless combat. I have not the strength of my own vision—not the strength needed to live with it and by its light. But now I am not alone. I am not alone, Persis, for you are with me. It was that I needed; another hand, which, when my lamp burned low, would shelter it and feed it anew with oil." He looked down and she saw it was because his eyes had filled with tears.

No trappings now; no tinsel. He was nearer her, stronger in his acknowledged human frailty, than she could have believed possible so soon after the foolish upbraiding of the day before. But how far he was from the Ludwig she had dreamed of only a little while ago. And she feared the claim he made upon

her. And she longed to be worthy of it. She was sick with compassion and shrinking. She rose with a sensation of flight.

"You must go and rest, Ludwig," she said, "and so must I. After your poem one needs to shut one's eyes and get one's breath."

He started to his feet. "It is true! It is true! Closed eyes, quiet breathing," he muttered; "in the dark after the thunder and lightning." She saw now what it had been, that uncanny brightness, that baleful and beautiful light which had affected her with hypnotic giddiness. The Eternal Return; that was the glare, the gaze, the steady horrid smile. But she had turned away from it, plunging herself in the trivial, sustaining appearances it made manifest. Her mind clung to her pity for Ludwig, to projects for his well-being. She urged upon him the need for nourishment before he slept. "To-morrow, yes, indeed, to-morrow," she answered him, going with him to the door. "I will be ready to-morrow." She smiled at him and the smile seemed the banner of an intrepid alpine climber overlooking the world from a dizzy ledge before turning to the higher peaks.

CHAPTER XXII

ON a warm afternoon, a week or so later, Persis came down from her studies and went through the garden to the river-path. Mrs. Fennamy, at this hour, always sat, when it was fine, out of doors with her sewing, and, as Eleanora took a nap, Persis knew that she should find her mother alone. She was unaware of seeking a refuge in her mother, hardly aware of seeking her; the instinct which moved her was that with which a child turns from the vaguely looming phantoms of midnight and buries its face in its pillow. Soon, among the golden turnings of the path, she caught sight of the glimmer of white and black and blue, and found her mother sitting on her favourite bench under the trees. Persis came and stood before her, looking about her for some moments, and then, as her mother, with a quiet, welcoming glance, continued to sew, she sat down beside her, and, leaning her arm along the back of the bench, picked vaguely at the loosened pieces of bark upon it.

"Tired?" Mrs. Fennamy inquired, presently.

"Yes, I am rather tired," said Persis. "I've been reading since luncheon, and I felt quite dizzy when I got up from my books."

"Were you in the sitting-room? It's a pity to

sit in your own room; the sun's so hot there in the afternoon."

"I know; but I like it better; there is more air. The sitting-room is a dismal little hole."

"I expect the sun's made your head ache," Mrs. Fennamy suggested, and Persis said:

"Perhaps it has."

A silence fell. Few people passed along the river-path. It was very warm. There was hardly a stir in the poplars and the river seemed to breathe rather than to flow.

"Mamma," said Persis, suddenly, while her hand continued to work at the bits of loosened bark, "would you like it if you were told that you would sit here, like this, with me, on an afternoon like this, with the river running there and the sun and that strip of sewing in your hands—that you were to find yourself like this over and over again for ever and ever?"

Mrs. Fennamy, while she went on sewing, contemplated the proposition put before her. "Well, this is rather pleasant, is n't it?" she said. "I should n't mind this sort of thing coming over and over again."

"Ah, but of course it would not be only pleasant things that came. The dreadful things would come, too."

"Yes; if everything came over and over again, the dreadful things would come too, of course," Mrs. Fennamy assented.

Persis looked at her in surprise. "I've sometimes thought that was the way things worked," Mrs. Fennamy went on, answering her daughter's look. "I got an idea of it when your father used to tell me about the nebulas making worlds, and then people coming from monkeys, and then things evoluting along until the planets and stars and all of it crashed up together again and went back to nebula. I can't see any reason why, once it's started, it shouldn't all work out regularly."

Persis, her hand stilled, gazed at her. As her silence grew long, her mother again looked up, "What difference would it make?" she inquired. "If it's so, it's gone on for ever, and we don't remember anything about it."

Persis continued to gaze. "We may not remember; but if we come to know? If in tragic moments and in all the long, dragging years of monotonous misery that people have, they come to know that it is all to come round again, for ever and ever? It seems to me that it would be a sort of hell."

Mrs. Fennamy considered. "But no one can ever know," she objected. "And no one can remember. We've never remembered yet, so we shan't begin to. I don't see why it's worse to go through it millions of times than to go through it once, so long as you don't remember. Has Herr Wehlitz been talking about it, Persis?"

Persis turned her head away, to look before her at the river. "Yes. He thinks he knows. It is a be-

lief of his. He thinks he can prove it," she said.

"Is that so?" Mrs. Fennamy murmured, and as, after this, she kept silence, Persis went on, irrelevantly it might seem:

"I suppose you have always found life worth while, mamma?"

"Well, I 've always found it interesting," said Mrs. Fennamy, after a moment.

"Although, of course, you must often have been very unhappy. Unhappiness is n't the worst thing, of course."

"Well, it can be pretty bad when it seems just not to mean anything."

"Ah! That is just it," Persis murmured. "When it seems not worth while; not even interesting. And how can things seem worth while if they are to be repeated for ever?"

"Why, we 'd go on thinking them worth while over and over again," said Mrs. Fennamy.

"Should we?" said Persis.

After this they relapsed into silence for some time. The young girl sat leaning forward, her hands folded together between her knees, her eyes fixed on the path. She had a curious idea. The still day seemed to have become a great, softly swinging, golden globe, enclosing her in loneliness. She felt appalled by the loneliness. She rose suddenly. "I think, mamma, that I shall go and have a little walk," she said. "I think that I shall find Herr Sachs, and make him walk with me."

Her mother raised eyes in which surprise mingled with solicitude. "Going to find Herr Sachs, Persis?" she repeated. "How do you mean, find him?"

"At his lodgings, if he is there. I want to talk to him."

"But I thought Graf von Lüdenstein was coming to play to us this afternoon. You said he might, you remember."

A faint flush rose to Persis's cheek. "Did I? Well, you must listen to him, mamma, or send him away."

"And what excuses shall I make?" Mrs. Fennamy asked, after a moment.

"Tell him that I have gone for a walk with Herr Sachs," said Persis. She turned away. She hardly knew whether she intended to go to Conrad. She only knew that her mother, with her innocent echo, was as dreadful as Ludwig, and that she must escape her.

She walked rapidly along the turnings of the little path, and she was thinking of Graf von Lüdenstein as she went. Why should she go to Herr Sachs, when Graf von Lüdenstein would come in an hour and play to her and when she could, if she liked, go out for a walk with him instead? She had not seen him alone since the day in the orchard. Yet though her mind lingered on the thought, it did not tempt her. She did not feel that anything could tempt her to-day. She felt only the loneliness and the sick desire for escape, and she did not feel that escape was to be found with

Graf von Lüdenstein. When she came to the little waterfall, she stepped out on the rustic bridge that spanned it and leaned there for some time, looking down at the clear, deep, sliding water, and as she looked it seemed to her that she had stood there looking down innumerable times; and so dizzily did the golden globe of the day turn with her that for a moment, closing her eyes, she laid her head down on her arms in a trance of terror. The thought of Conrad came, like a faint knocking, from far away. She raised herself. Yes; that was it—his mother's gift. She remembered suddenly. They must choose it together, and a gaiety almost light-headed filled her as she left the bridge and walked rapidly into the town. She knew that it was a fictitious gaiety, dry, dead, rustling; but she clung to it, even forcing her steps to chime to some lilt of rhythm as she went. Her mood recalled to her a time in childhood when, horribly frightened by a picture she had seen, she ran, in the hotel where they were staying, to the bath-room, undressed quickly, and sank down into a tub of deep hot water, closing her eyes and steeping herself in the obliterating sensuous pleasure. Yes; it was like that, this gaiety at the thought of a present for Frau Sachs; and even better, for it did not seem to obliterate so much as to lead to something, to put a clue in her hand.

She reached the little street, found the door, and knocked; and then, almost immediately, she saw him leaning from above.

"I have come for you," she said, looking up at him. She did not smile now, and the impulse that had brought her to him lit her face with a still, cold brightness. "Yes," she went on, seeing his astonishment, "I am going to interrupt all your studies. Tell Ludwig that I have done so, if you like! You are to come out with me, and get the present for your mother."

"The present for my mother, Fräulein?" Sachs echoed. And feeling that she was almost happy, she laughed, as an imperious fairy appearing to waft one irresistibly away might have laughed, and said:

"Yes; come down at once."

The young man's amazed scrutiny overhung her for another moment; then his head was withdrawn, submissively, it was evident. Soon she heard his crutch on the stair, and then the door opened and he stepped out beside her, the funny round hat on his head and another tie hastily adjusted—not that this red-spotted green was an improvement.

It seemed to Persis now that she felt quite happy. She would have liked to sing, to skip, to whistle, as they walked away together, she adapting her light stride to his broken pace. "Do you ever feel," she said, "that unless you are very nonsensical you will be very unhappy—for no reason at all, I mean? Are you ever unreasonable? I feel like that to-day. If I had n't found you, if you had refused to come, I should probably have gone and jumped into the river—just under the waterfall, you know. The

water is very deep there, and one's head might not come up too often as one drowned—especially if one had the good fortune in falling to strike it on a rock." Her pale face and pale radiant eyes sparkled with a challenging gaiety.

He answered in the key she set, though his eyes studied her. But she could trust him to understand and to feel the reality that her words might seem to flout. He smiled. "But there are so few rocks in the river. And the force of the current would carry you quickly to a shallow spot. You would have had to wade ashore, Fräulein, in a most humiliating fashion, twenty yards below the bridge."

"Life is full of such puerile ironies," said Persis. "And you uphold it! You applaud it! I know that you do. You would think it altogether satisfactory that a person who wished to leave it should have to wade ashore shamefacedly."

"I am glad, certainly, if a person is given time for reflection."

"Because you think that reflection would always lead them to prefer life."

"I hope so, Fräulein. It is often the case, is it not?"

"It is more often the case, I think, that we prefer life when we do not allow ourselves to reflect. Have you ever known anyone who was given further time and was glad of it?"

"Yes," he nodded, still smiling, if with a touch of constraint. "Yes; I have known such a one."

It might have been himself. She felt sure that it had been himself. And she could see that ugly, comic face stricken with despair.

"And have you ever known anyone who succeeded?" she went on.

"Yes. A friend of mine, in my student days, in Leipsig, shot himself."

"Why did he do it?"

"He had persuaded himself, Fräulein, that he knew what was to be known of life and that it was valueless. He reflected too much, you will say, for one so young. There was pride, too, in the act. He had often talked to us, his comrades, of his intention to kill himself."

"I should not do it from pride," said Persis, after a little silence, "but from finding life valuless—I can imagine that—from emptiness, apathy, deadness of heart—from unwillingness to will any longer. Not that I shall be tempted for many years; I am too full of life. But I can imagine that state of unwillingness to will."

"Yes. I too. It is the final temptation."

They had walked on, away from the town, and had now entered on a broad road where a few scattered houses with their gardens and two rows of old linden trees marked the merging of the town into the country. Beyond the lindens the road ran between fields, bordered with autumnal field-flowers. On a bench under one of the lindens they sat down. Persis was never to forget the day; the bright, dreamy fields and

the sky and the scattered gold of the linden leaves about them.

"But if one cannot will, one cannot, and there is an end of it," she said. "How can it be a temptation?"

"There is always the power to will, Fräulein, unless the brain is diseased."

"To will what? What can save anyone in the moment when they do not desire life? And why should they be saved?"

Sachs was silent for some moments, vaguely stirring with the end of his crutch the golden leaves. He said at length: "One can always will to pray."

"To pray?" Her echo came after a pause of the astonishment he so often caused her. A certain indignation, too, was in her voice. Was this the stone he had to offer?

"Yes, Fräulein," said Sachs. "That means nothing to you, or worse than nothing—jugglery, self-deception. You have never prayed. Life—what you think of as desirable—is still, as you say, so strong in you, and it has always been enough."

"No; I have never prayed," she assented. "I do not believe that there is anyone or anything to pray to."

He was silent, looking down at the leaves, and as some time then passed and he said nothing, she found herself forced to ask, if still with the note of resentment: "What happens when you pray?"

"It would be difficult to put it into words, Fräu-

lein," said Sachs, who, though he must be aware of her displeasure, showed no sign of his frequent shyness. And now she said with some urgency:

"Well, try to tell me—to explain."

"The words would only mean foolishness to you, Fräulein."

"No; they will not. No, I promise you."

He met her eyes for a moment, and then said: "I will try, Fräulein. In that deadness, that apathy you speak of, a breath blows upon us, we may not know from where, when we pray. It is the spirit of life answering our spirit. We feel this breath, and the desire for life again arises in us—we will to will, to be, to love. You do not know it yet, Fräulein, nor believe in it; but it is the world's great reality, this breath of the spirit." He looked away from her now and down at the golden leaves that his stick still stirred softly, and he went on, but as if he were speaking to himself rather than to her: "Woe to him who does not listen to the voice when it speaks and who does not follow when it calls within him! It is not emptiness he will then know, but chains and darkness, perhaps despair. We choke and stifle if we refuse to breathe with the breath of the spirit when it comes to us. But if we listen and rise up and gird ourselves—always, always you will find it so, for it cannot fail—it creates new life in us. And it is then that our will—I have often thought it—becomes like the spider that launches itself upon the breeze. We spin the web we live by. Life grows round us, ring by ring,

in beauty, though it may be with much pain and effort. And with the growing life comes faith in life. Why will they call it illusion? It is the only reality, this life-created life. And why distrust the joy that is its sanction? Why should despair be conceived of as the seal of truth? It is the lure of death; it is death, strewing dust in our souls. Truth may be sad and difficult, but joy comes with the acceptance of it if the breath of the spirit is in us making us strong."

Persis sat gazing at his quiet profile. It was strange to her to hear him speak with this gentle absoluteness and without the tone of conventional piety which she associated with such words. He himself, rather than what he said, absorbed her. Yet, though what he said seemed far away and unattainable, like ranges of white cloud shining on the horizon, something of its power and tranquillity enveloped her, and in her heart something dimly stirred as though it felt, faintly upon it, that breath of which he spoke.

A long time seemed to pass before she wished to speak, and the wish came with a sense of perplexity. "Do you know, it is strange, but what you have said makes me think of what Ludwig says, though so differently. I see Ludwig's thought always like a torch waving in darkness. Your thought is like a star; one of those stars at evening, so far away, so faint that at moments you lose it, and then again so keen that you wonder you do not always keep it. Yet the star makes me think of the torch."

He had raised his head, and he was looking at her,

with delight, it was evident. His eyes ardently examined her as if to read how deeply she might herself be aware of the meaning of her own words.

"You see it too, Fräulein! You see that it is what Ludwig says! That makes me very happy. It is true; so few see it, but it is true. Change but one word in his creed, only put love in place of power, and it is done. Ah, but this is wonderful, to know that you, too, see!"

"Yes; the life-creating will. But with Ludwig it all swings in emptiness." She thought of her golden globe of horror. Ludwig's nightmare theory was there, lying under everything at the bottom of her mind. She had refused to promise Ludwig that she would not ask counsel as to his doctrine of Herr Sachs; yet she would keep silence as to that darkest fear. Herr Sachs would feel it right that she should.

"Ludwig is an unhappy man, Fräulein," he said. "He is in prison. But the prison wall will break. He will breathe. He will come to see that the life he accepts, the life he praises, is more than his and ours, more than the life of some future perfected humanity's. Without that love encompassing all things, yes, we should swing in emptiness."

"But how could the prison break?" Persis asked. "What is there to break it?"

"Sometimes, Fräulein, it is happiness that breaks the prison and lets the air of heaven in."

Sachs's eyes still dwelt on her with their vicarious ardour. She could not meet it. She could not think

of Ludwig and his prison to-day. Ludwig, too, seemed far away. Only Herr Sachs was near her, saving her from loneliness. She rose. "It would need some one who could pray to break Ludwig's prison," she said. "And how could one pray while one was his pupil? It is a vicious circle. But come; let us look for your mother's present now. What shall it be? A coffee-set? That is what I thought of. I know a shop where they sell pretty china."

He had remained for a moment looking up at her, still earnestly, as though unwilling to accept this sudden arbitrariness. Then, faintly grimacing, as though he recognized with good humour his own discomfiture, he rose, and they turned back to the town.

"Don't think that I am not grateful," said Persis after they had gone a little way; "I am—more than you can guess, perhaps—for what you have said—for your being so good to me. I was very unhappy when I came to you."

"I saw that you were in trouble, Fräulein."

"No; not trouble; not trouble exactly," said Persis, turning her eyes away. "It was unhappiness without trouble, if you know what that is. Now I feel that you have helped me."

He asked no question, limping along beside her, and, in a changed tone, she went on presently: "Do you know, if Ludwig is not to frighten me; it 's still quite possible that you may! Yes, a little; because if I saw much of you I should feel that I must be

good, and I should n't like to feel that. I should only like to feel that I might perhaps some day try goodness after I had tried other things."

Sachs smiled. "You make me think, Fräulein, of a cascade, leaping very wildly among rocks and taking daring springs. But some day you will become a river, strong, deep, full of purpose."

"A river?" Persis objected. "Oh no; I would rather stay a cascade. I don't like appointed channels and fixed goals. It is n't everyone who has a change of heart, you know. Some cascades remain cascades until they tumble into the sea and some hearts remain unregenerate. Now, here is our shop. And there are coffee-sets; three coffee-sets. Look carefully and say which one you like best."

They had reached the principal street of Tannenkreuz, cheerful and variegated with the booths and shops of glass merchants and lace merchants and sellers of the semi-precious stones that were found in the mountains near by, with little cafés and cake-shops, their chairs and tables set out invitingly on the pavement in the shade of the trees. Sachs, looking, indeed, a little bewildered by the giddy leaps of the cascade, gazed obediently into the window, and, after some moments of deliberation, he pointed out a very deplorable little set, brightly painted with blue ribbons and pink and yellow flowers.

"Oh no," said Persis, smiling; "not that. The one with the gilt sprigs is far prettier."

"Is it, Fräulein? You know best."

"I think that about coffee-sets I do. The gilt-sprigged one is the one for us."

They went into the shop, and Persis ordered the china to be sent to the address which Sachs, with a pleased perturbation, supplied her, writing on the card enclosed with it: "A little gift from a friend of Conrad's." "And now," she said, as they stepped into the street again, "we will go to that corner shop where the tables have those nice red and white checked cloths and sit under the awnings and drink coffee together. It is the best shop in Tannenkreuz for cinnamon cakes."

It was very much like a fairy tale, and, after their grave interlude, she was again the imperious fairy. "Tell me," she said, when they were seated at their little table, "do you often joke and make funny imitations, as you did on that day when Ludwig was ill?"

"I have always, among my intimates, been a clown," said Sachs. "You found me very foolish, I think."

"No; I don't think I found you foolish. I was surprised and interested. Could you do something funny for me now—the dogs, or the pigs?"

"Here in the street, Fräulein? I should be too shy!"

"Have you no quieter things, then?"

"Oh yes, some very quiet ones. But no, I am too shy, Fräulein." He was, indeed, laughing with some embarrassment.

"You mean that I am not an intimate."

"Not that, Fräulein. Only you are not foolish. I cannot see you making uproarious jokes. And I should feel that you found me foolish rather than funny."

"Perhaps I should," said Persis, smiling at his acuteness. "I think I have not much sense of humour—though I should like to see you foolish; for to-day, you know, I need foolishness—anything, to keep me from reflecting. But tell me instead about yourself. Did you make jokes for your brothers and sisters when they were little?"

He said that he did, and then, in answer to her questions, told her about these brothers and sisters, the professor, the pastor, the nursery-governess in the English rectory, and about their reunions at Christmas and the Christmas-tree that their mother always made for them—yes, even now, when they were all grown up. After this he asked her, smiling at her gently, about her own childhood, and she told him what she could remember. It seemed a much more distant place than his. She had only had a Christmas-tree once, when she was very little, in America; and she seemed never to have known any children.

Her mother, when she saw her that evening, told her that Wehlitz had appeared on the river-path soon after her departure, and that on being told that she had gone to see Herr Sachs he had shown every sign of displeasure and perturbation. "I did n't know that he was jealous of Herr Sachs, too, Persis," said

Mrs. Fennamy. "He's a very jealous man. I thought it would make him feel better when I said you'd gone to talk over his theory about things coming back again—but it seemed to make him feel worse."

"Well, as it happens. I did not go to talk over his theory," said Persis. "That was your own inference, mamma; though I'm not sorry that Ludwig should think I did. He is a very jealous man, as you say, and the sooner he is cured of his thin-skinnedness the better."

"I think it did cheer him up a little when I told him you'd broken your engagement with Graf von Lüdenstein," Mrs. Fennamy went on, "and I asked him to stay and listen to him play with Eleanora and me and have coffee with us, and he did, and we had quite a pleasant afternoon. But I could see that he was pretty vague. He sat staring in front of him most of the time, and clenching and unclenching his jaws the way he does. I could see the muscles in his cheeks working."

CHAPTER XXIII

PERSIS was prepared to see the muscle working next morning, but the first glance at Ludwig showed her that he was determined to control, if not able to conceal, his sense of injury; and she was glad, indeed, of this, for she had waked with a sense of deep fatigue, almost of apathy; and though she felt a new toleration of Ludwig's weaknesses, a new tenderness for him, she had no energy to face a renewal of foolish struggles. Nor, though the nightmare seemed to have slipped from her during sleep, did she feel ready to follow his theories this morning.

"I don't want a lesson to-day," she said after they had shaken hands. "I am going to have a drive. We can talk while we drive. I am tired of this stuffy little room, and of the garden, too."

A little chaise, drawn by two stout ponies, driven after the fashion in Tannenkreuz, by a boy perched high behind, stood before the door, and Ludwig, after she had made this announcement, turned and observed it for some moments before replying. "You had ordered it?" he questioned then. "You made so sure that I would come? You think that you can so easily dispose of my time for me?"

Whether it were apathy or kindliness she did not

know, but she felt that it would be difficult for Ludwig to vex her to-day.

"I made so sure that I cared to go," she said smiling. "With you, I hoped; but if not with you, then with Mamma or Eleanora, or Herr Sachs or Graf von Lüdenstein. I knew that among them all I should find a companion." This seizing of the bull by the horns left Ludwig, she could see, much at a loss.

"Ah! Yes. I comprehend," he murmured.

"But I did not order the boy," she went on. "I saw him driving down the street ten minutes ago and stopped him. I felt that I must drive, up to the pine-woods. Well, will you come with me, Ludwig?"

He suspected her of laughing at him or of evading him or of deceiving him in some way, she felt sure, but, sulkily, after a pause, he replied: "Yes. I will come."

"I am so glad. We can talk as well while we drive, and even better than we can here, don't you think?"

"Ah! for that I cannot answer."

She handed him her silk cloak to help her on with. He was not skilful in the performance of these minor graces and she felt doubt and surmise in the very gestures with which he tugged the easy garment over her shoulders. "You have not had much to do with women, have you, Ludwig?" she smiled, disengaging the lace scarf which he had twisted into the neck of the cloak and drawing down the sleeves. And Weh-

litz, a deepened suspicion of being taken lightly in his voice, replied: "With women? No; I have spent little of my time in frivolities."

They went outside. The boy had got down and stood in readiness.

"I will drive," said Wehlitz. "It is for the man to drive."

He was affording her genuine amusement, though it was not untouched by pain. Why would he, great, terrible man, be so small? "By all means, if you feel it necessary to your manly dignity," she answered. The languor of her tone did not conceal its irony.

He took the reins without replying, the boy climbed to his high seat behind them and they went clattering down the street with every appearance of cheerfulness. They drove for some time in silence, Wehlitz very erect, handling the reins with an inappropriate air of mastery; and it was only after they had left the town and were on the steep road leading up the mountain that he said suddenly, in a voice pitifully schooled: "It was a pleasant afternoon you passed with Conrad yesterday?"

"Very pleasant," she answered.

"Conrad, I hope, did not misinterpret a freedom of behaviour to which, in Europe, we are not accustomed?" Wehlitz continued.

"I hope not; I do not think so," said Persis smiling. "He does not seem to me a person to misinterpret many things."

"Ah. No. Conrad, it is true, has intelligence.

For taste, I do not say. That is a faculty of finer and longer lineage. Taste might deplore certain appearances. And what was Conrad's verdict, may I ask, on my doctrine of the Eternal Return?"

"We did not talk of that," said Persis dryly.

He started, flushing deeply, and turned his head to look at her.

"I beg your pardon, but I think you have forgotten. I had it from your mother that it was with that intention that you went to seek him."

"Yes. I know that you had it from her; so she told me," said Persis. "She had imagined, you see, that your jealousy was personal and would not extend to intellectual matters. She was placating you, she thought. As it happens I did not go to him for that; it was Mamma's inference, merely, because she and I had been talking of the Eternal Return—she, too, believes in it;—is not that interesting! We said almost nothing of you, Herr Sachs and I, as far as I remember."

Wehlitz was breathing heavily.

"I went to find him so that we could get a present for his mother," Persis went on, after a pause, "which I had told him I wanted to send to her. We found a very nice coffee-set and I sent it to her—from a friend of Conrad's—I put on it. I sent it because I thought it would give her pleasure, and I am so fond of him that I wanted to give his mother pleasure. What is she like—Herr Sachs's mother? Have you seen her?"

"Seen her? Certainly I have seen her. She is a heavy plebeian like her son," said Wehlitz in a muffled voice, dealing the ponies, as he spoke, a sharp cut across the flanks.

The colour mounted in the young girl's cheeks. She was shocked. This she had not expected from Ludwig; no, not even in his worst moods. "That is a strange way in which to speak of your friend," she murmured.

"Of my friend! Certainly of my friend!" Wehlitz cried loudly. "Why not of him! I speak the truth of all men! I do not scorn the populace when it shows capacity to rise. Have I ever denied that he has capacity? Yes; my friend; though a plebeian. And he will know no better friend than I."

She kept silence, her eyes fixed before her on the ranges of pine-woods among which they wound their way. She had heard the tears in his tones and could interpret his shame and she was willing to help him. "We did not talk of your doctrines," she said after a little while, "but of Herr Sachs's. You are familiar with them, I suppose."

"The Christian dogmas of submission, renunciation, love for the weak and piteous; yes, I am familiar with them, these old dogmas in their latest modern dress. You know my opinion of Christianity; the refuge of the unfit—the menace to the strong. Its success, in all ages, all the world over, is easy to understand. The impotent, filled with spite, revenge

themselves upon the strong who, in this life, hold them in subjection, by imagining another life where they will have eternal domination. Ha-ha!—a noble creed!" He lashed again at the ponies and they started forward at a brisk trot.

"I heard nothing of such a creed from Herr Sachs. In what you say of religion it seems to me sometimes that you think you overthrow more than you do."

"Ah! you think that I deceive myself as to the originality of my doctrine!" The muscle in his cheek was twitching. He lashed again, and Persis now leaned and took the whip from him, he too much absorbed in his angry broodings to notice, for the moment, her action.

"No; I don't think you deceive yourself as to its originality," said Persis, lenient, but determined to be just; "only that you do deceive yourself somewhat as to what it has accomplished. What is the enhanced, the higher, the self-transcending life you believe in but the life the saint lives?"

"Saints? Why do you talk of saints?" cried Wehlitz angrily. "Give me my whip!"

She passed it to the other hand and he added, after another fiercely brooding pause: "the saint has no strength. He is an idol-worshipper. Take his idol from him, tell him that his heaven is empty, and he crumbles into dust."

"Conrad does not crumble, I am sure." Persis softly flicked the whip in the air.

"Conrad is a fool," said Wehlitz, with intense bit-

terness. "He pulls a thick hood over his head and because all is quiet and warm and dark within, he says: 'Here is God; God is with me; I am happy; I am at peace.' Ah! it would not frighten Conrad to know that his heaven was empty?—he would not crumble? Only because he refuses to look at the truth. He talks to you of his simpering, long-bearded grandpapa seated on his golden throne, seated on his throne in Conrad's little soul—so pure and white!—It is easy to be confident when we are in the good graces of our grandpapa!—Give me my whip!—I will not be treated like a child!"

They were on a turn of the hill-side, on one hand the rise of the woods with their climbing regiments of pines, on the other an abrupt fall to descending tree-tops; a light railing only bordered the road. And as Wehlitz now leaned suddenly to her, catching at her arm, the whip fell clattering across the ponies' flanks, they reared violently and broke into a wild gallop. Persis saw their great danger. She had time to leap forward, catch the reins aside, and pull the ponies back upon their haunches, while, swaying heavily, the chaise crashed on a broken wheel and fell over in the road. In another moment they must have been precipitated down upon the trees below.

Persis was the first to find her feet. She had fallen clear of the chaise and felt no hurt. Her first thought was to run to the ponies' heads. One had fallen; the other, dragged at by the broken harness, stood trembling. Wehlitz drew himself on hands and

knees from under the chaise and the boy, with a face of unresentful astonishment, sat in the ditch.

"Are you hurt?" she called to Wehlitz. His forehead was bleeding but otherwise he seemed unscathed. He did not answer and she had, unaided, to assist the prostrate pony to its feet. "Poor dears, what a shock for them," she murmured, stroking their panting sides. "You might have killed them."

"Might have killed them?" Wehlitz cried in a shrill, shaking voice in which tears and fury mingled. "Speak for yourself! It is your work! And you might have killed other than dumb beasts!"

"My pity is certainly with the dumb beasts," said Persis, "and you were responsible for the accident. If you were going to snatch for the whip like an unmannerly school-boy, you should at least have looked to see where you were driving."

"Yes! Yes!—that's it!" Wehlitz cried, jerking his clenched fists up and down at his sides in a singular fashion as he stood before her. "Give to yourself always the heroic rôle and on me place the fools-cap!"

"You seem, perhaps, more in need of a bandage," said Persis, smiling despite herself. "Did you know that you were hurt? Don't let us stand here quarrelling. Give me your handkerchief and I will tie up your head."

"You are hurt yourself!" he cried, pointing to her arm. "There is blood on your sleeve! No! You shall not touch me! It is my place to succour

you! Your desire always is to abase and to humiliate me!"

Tears had risen to his eyes. Her anger against him melted and he became to her a foolish and piteous little boy who must be petted and humoured. "Be reasonable, Ludwig," she said with an almost maternal smile. "You should succour me, of course, if I needed it; but mine is a mere scratch; yes; look. It is nothing. You are really hurt. Feel the blood on your cheek. Are you convinced?—Eleanora and Herr Sachs will be ready to cut me to pieces when they see what I have done to their hero. Now let me bind you up."

He had put up his hand and looked at the blood upon it, gloomily, for a moment and then, in silence, he drew out his handkerchief and gave it to her and bowed his head before her, muttering only: "You think all the reason is on your side. For a head so young, your assurance is astonishing."

"And for a head so great and wise," said Persis, pressing it lightly between her hands as she enwound it, "how hot and hasty a one this is!" Her voice was playful, even mischievous, but the affection in it was a balm. The ground of their quarrel faded from his mind, and, fretful as he was and full of wounded vanity, his eyes dwelt on her for a moment, as he at last could raise them to hers, with a sort of gloomy tenderness.

"You will have to rest for some days after this, I 'm afraid," she said, giving him her arm and opening

her parasol over him. They left the overturned chaise behind, and the boy, leading the ponies, followed them. Far below, like a toy town, Tannenkreuz lay in the sunlight.

"Some days, indeed," said Wehlitz. "And it is serious, very serious, the interruption to my work. It is not as amusing as you may imagine to lie in a darkened room with a bandage on one's head."

"It must be anything but amusing. You will let me come and see you, often, won't you—and we will make coffee for you every day."

"I shall not be allowed to drink coffee. But, yes, I hope that you will be able to spare me a little of your time."

It was wiser to be silent. They went on without speaking for a little way. Suddenly Wehlitz stopped short. Persis's eyes, following his, saw them fixed on a figure that was approaching them from below and in a moment she had recognized it as Graf von Lüdenstein's.

"I will not meet him! No! I will not meet him so!" Wehlitz exclaimed, gazing wildly down at the tree-tops and up at the high escarpment of the bank. Its sandy soil was piled too steeply for an ascent to the woods to be possible, and he turned as though meditating a flight up the road.

Persis caught him by the sleeve. "But Ludwig," she said. "What is there to be ashamed of? Why not meet him? It was only an accident. Listen to me." He faced her again, angry, protesting, be-

wildered. Lüdenstein, for a moment, was hidden by a turning.

"It was only an accident," Persis repeated. "We were absorbed in talk and the ponies ran away. What is there to be ashamed of? You look a hero with your bandaged head."

"A hero! Yes! He will find me one indeed! I know him! I know his sneering smile! You do not know Lüdenstein! He thinks himself above all weaknesses."

"And since he will not see you trying to escape him, there are no weaknesses for him to discover." Lüdenstein had appeared round the bend in the road and she waved her hand to him.

He hurried forward to meet them. "What has happened! What is it?" he exclaimed with a look of consternation. "You are wounded, Ludwig!"

"Are we not a romantic pair," said Persis, answering for Ludwig who walked on in silence, raising his hand to his bandaged head. "Who could have suspected those fat ponies of such an escapade? Yes, they ran away with us; we were absorbed in talk, and they nearly threw us over the road-side. We saved ourselves only just in time. The chaise overturned with us and Ludwig's head is badly cut."

"But my friend! I am distressed beyond words," Lüdenstein spoke in tones of sincere solicitude. "This is not well for you. Yours is not a head we can risk in roadside tumbles."

Persis was surprised and ironically amused to notice that to herself he gave no attention.

Ludwig meanwhile continued to walk forward in silence. But, suddenly, turning very pale, he stopped. "I am ill," he said. "I am very ill." He sat down on a rock beside the road.

Lüdenstein knelt beside him. "Ludwig, you shall rest here. Fräulein Fennamy will stay beside you and I will go quickly back and send a vehicle for you. Lean on her arm."

It was almost tenderness, and that Ludwig felt it was evidenced by his fretful, yet grateful rejoinder. "No; no, you will stay with me, Ernst. If I should lose consciousness it is well that a man should be with me. It is my head. It is the wound in my head. Persis will go"; he closed his eyes and his head sunk on Lüdenstein's shoulder.

Persis turned away without speaking. She gathered up her skirts and ran down the road towards Tannenkreuz.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT was Lüdenstein who called next morning, and Persis watched him coming down the street, his heavy, yet lightly, almost jauntily carried body, his air of cheerful well-being, with a glance of irony. The irony included Ludwig, for she could guess why Sachs had not been sent. And Ludwig's folly was a satisfaction. It justified her. In what, she could not have said.

It was the first time that she had been alone with Lüdenstein since their conversation in the orchard. He had come, once or twice. Persis, with a suavity delightful to herself, had secured her mother's presence for a pleasant afternoon of music. To keep her powerful admirer thus in harness made her feel like an Omphale, watching a helpless Hercules in the toils. Now, as he entered, she turned to meet him with a smile.

"So you are sent with news of our invalid," she said. "The news is good I trust, and the injury to his head not as serious as you seemed to fear."

Lüdenstein, too, was smiling. "Not quite as serious. He will soon be about again. And here is a note he sends you."

She opened it. It was curt. Would she please

come to him that afternoon. "Will you tell him I will," she said, lifting her eyes to Lüdenstein, who, still smiling, stood considering her. "It needs no more than a verbal answer."

"You are displeased with our poor Ludwig this morning?"

"No, not at all displeased, amused, perhaps."

"And I, too, am amused," Lüdenstein remarked, after a moment. "Yet, if you allude to jealousy, let me say that I do not know that I find it so misplaced. No," as she gazed at him in astonishment; "I sympathise with Ludwig. Spiritual friendships are devastating to other friendships. Poor Ludwig! He is not fortunate in friendship or in love."

"He is certainly fortunate in yours," said Persis, after a moment, and with a dryness that did not conceal indignation.

"Well, yes," Lüdenstein raised his eyebrows. "I am with you. Ludwig, I consider, has no better friend than myself."

"He must indeed, yesterday, have thought you the most devoted of friends."

"Indeed, yes. And why not?"

And as she stood, looking out into the street and making no reply, he went on: "And you are, I see, displeased with me because I so carefully concealed from Ludwig yesterday my interest in you."

"I certainly do not see how you contrive to reconcile your fondness for him with your feeling for me."

Lüdenstein now seated himself at the piano and ran his fingers over the keys. She stood beside him, though still not looking at him, and it was strange, as so often before, to know that, though she found him almost an evil man, she could not dislike him.

"It is true," said Lüdenstein presently, while he continued softly to play chords and arpeggios. "I deceive my friend, if that is what you deprecate. But that is precisely my method of reconciliation. My conception of friendship is to make my friend happy, if that is compatible with my own happiness. To reconcile my love for you, and my friendship with Ludwig, is not that pure gain, to one whose standard is that of expediency only?"

"And if you could not reconcile them?" Persis asked ironically. "If you had to choose between us?"

He narrowed his eyes. "You mean between losing his friendship and winning your love? Ah, then, unflinchingly, I should behave towards Ludwig as he in his writings counsels the strong to behave towards the weak; I should ride him down. I agree with Ludwig, altogether, that life is a craving, conquering force and that the good of the few cannot be reconciled with the good of the many. And not only do I admire Ludwig's precepts; I follow them—which is more than he is able to do. He is one of the craving but not of the conquering type, our Ludwig."

She had turned her eyes on his now, with the dim ironic smile that she felt as a shield between them.

"Ludwig has a great many unconscious followers, as you must know. You speak as though you were in some way singular in your practices; they are those of most people, I imagine."

"Certainly, with the difference which makes me singular, that they are unconscious and I conscious of what I do."

She left the abstract theme. "So that your friendship for Ludwig depends upon your hopelessness in regard to me. It is a strange idea of friendship."

"Ah, but it is you who seem to insist on the alternative," Lüdenstein smiled drowsily at her while he pressed deep, deliberate, yet urgent chords. "I might keep my friend and win you. You would remain his Egeria, and a wiser, more tolerant, more powerful one for the accepted ambiguity of your position. Nothing gives more strength than to choose and maintain ambiguity. I, too, can deal in aphorisms, you see, Fräulein Persis. I shock you? You find such ambiguity shocking?"

She had again turned her eyes away and was gazing out into the street with a haughty, abstracted gaze. "No; oh, no; not shocking. Tasteless. Offensive."

Lüdenstein, ceasing to play, looked up at her in silence for a moment. "I would ride him down, if you preferred that."

She continued to gaze into the street. "There is no question of my preference. Your alternatives do not exist for me."

Still, though his hands were on the keys, he did not play and the cessation of the urgent undertone was at once a relief and an anxiety; she felt less menaced but more exposed, without that low murmur of encompassing sound. "You are very indignant with me," he said, "because I tell you that a woman may love one man and be none the less a true friend to another. Yet you are very determined on maintaining your independence with Ludwig. You insist, for instance, unless I misread certain signs, on your right to your friendship with little Sachs. What I propose is that you should carry that same independence a little further; if it is to carry it further."

Actually, he seemed to be arguing with her, as though she had initiated such argument. She was bewildered, and, as, for the moment, she found no reply, he went on. "I know what you will say. Your bond with Ludwig does not prevent other friendships, but it prevents a love-affair, a concealed love-affair. I do not deal in these conventions. Since I am not to ride him down, since I need not choose that alternative,—I confess it would be painful,—it is Ludwig's happiness and unhappiness that I may think of, and I assert that my regard for his welfare is quite as tender as yours. You torture him, willingly, with this spiritual comradeship with little Sachs—ah, Fräulein, I could read the signs the other day, when you left me in the lurch to seek out our jester—and you would abandon him without hesitation if a satisfactory marriage offered itself to you. Come now, is it not

true that it is convention, merely, that rules your feeling in this matter?"

She stood in the dim little room looking out into the street and it seemed to her, enmeshed, perplexed, almost appalled, that her inability to deny what he said was a bond between them. "I respect marriage," she said. "I despise illicit and concealed love-affairs."

He was looking up at her and softly laughing. "Convention, mere convention," he said.

"Moreover," Persis found, with a grasp as if at some floating spar, "you seem to forget that since I do not love you the question does not arise."

"No; I do not forget it," said Lüdenstein. "I remember it, I assure you, quite well. I only ask you to own that, if you did love me, it ought not, with a proud, strong woman like you, to arise."

She wished, passionately, to prove her strength, to himself and to herself. "If I loved you," and she brought her eyes now firmly to his face, "it could not arise, for such a love-affair would not be concealed."

"Ah," looking up at her he struck now a deep, triumphant chord; "if you loved me, we should ride Ludwig down, relentlessly. Good. It is not kind. It is not pitying; but it is Ludwig's own doctrine. I should ask nothing better of you."

She turned away. "I must study now. This is my time for study. We have talked enough of these absurdities." Her voice was trembling; did he hear it?

He rose, acquiescent, courteous. He took his hat; he stood before her. "But we shall have our music one day soon again?"

"Yes; oh, yes."

"Perhaps to-morrow?"

"No; not to-morrow."

"The next day, then."

"Perhaps. I will see what time I have."

She longed for him to go. She was filled with a horror of what she might have seemed to have avowed to him. She must be alone and, fiercely, closely, rehearse the conversation and see what she had done.

CHAPTER XXV

"HERR SACHS! Herr Sachs!" said Persis. She had been waiting for him to pass, for a very long time it seemed to her. It was at this hour that he returned from Ludwig's along the river path. He saw her face looking at him, not smiling, from behind the bars. "I want to talk to you," she said.

But Sachs, evidently, did not want to stop. Uncertainty and anxiety were in his gaze and he stood in the path looking at her while she swung the grille back on its hinges. "Come in," she said. "Or shall I come out to you? for talk to you I will. Yes. I have been waiting for you. You are not afraid of me?" A provocative note was in her voice.

"No, Fräulein," said Sachs, looking away from her with a rueful smile. "But perhaps I ought to be. I do not know that I ought to stop."

"You mean that it will throw Ludwig into a fever if he hears of it. He recovers from such fevers. Already, I am sure you have seen it, he is more reasonable, more amenable. These days of his convalescence have been quite pleasant and peaceful; don't you think so?"

"I am sometimes afraid that you amuse yourself with tormenting Ludwig, Fräulein. Yes, they have

been peaceful days; perhaps because there has been so little in them."

"But that is not true, to say that I torment him," said Persis, and her young face darkened almost to a look of sternness. "You all, yes, all of you, Eleanora, Graf von Lüdenstein, take sides with Ludwig, always, against me. What have I done but maintain my independence? What did I do the other day, on that drive, but ignore his ill-temper in regard to you until he began to beat the ponies so unmercifully that I had to take the whip from him. Yes—that was the truth of that story, though, to protect Ludwig, I have told another one."

He had entered now and was following her to an old bench set against the wall at the bottom of the garden, and he sighed deeply and involuntarily as he sank down upon it.

"If only Ludwig would conquer this puerile jealousy," Persis went on with the air of excitement apparent in her to-day. "If only he could learn to be more tolerant of a word of opposition, we might be very happy."

Sachs sat looking in front of him. "You are hard, Fräulein," he said at last. "You do not seem to understand Ludwig as I hoped you were to understand him. You do not understand that a deep fear may show itself in puerile actions and yet be none the less grave and real. How can he not resent our meetings, yours and mine, when he must feel that you seek in me to stay yourself against his doctrines?"

Persis, at this, was for a moment silent. "But it is not true. I do not talk of Ludwig's doctrines to you," she said presently. "Never since that first day. I fight against them alone."

"Not quite alone, Fräulein," said Sachs, also after a little pause, "for though we do not speak of them we know that they are there. If they frighten you, it is well that you should have a refuge; but I ask you to see that to Ludwig such a refuge must seem a menace."

At this Persis sat silent for some moments. During these last days she had struggled with closer and more tangible fears. Ludwig's nightmare theory seemed their background. It was as if she saw herself lured by the hypnotic whisper of the future, yet pressed forward, too, by the past, by the dark, accumulated cloud of fate upon whose wheel she was to turn for ever. Already, down the endless reaches of that backward time, she had listened to Graf von Lüdenstein; again and again she had listened. And if she was to draw still nearer to the sinister tree of life, would it not be because already she had done so, and was to do so, for all the past and all the future? She saw herself menaced by an obsession. It was a succour to think that she was ill; ill, not incredibly tempted. And now, turning at last her eyes on the little cripple, she said, wondering at the great gulfs that parted their minds, even at this moment when they seemed so near: "Did you guess that Ludwig's theory of the Eternal Return frightened me

more than all the rest. You know that theory? Has it never frightened you?"

"No; it has not frightened me, Fräulein," he answered, looking at her very thoughtfully. "And you, too, will not long have allowed such a nightmare to trouble you."

"No, no, I do not think it troubles me now; not so much. It is a nightmare, then? You are sure that it is a nightmare?"

"It does not seem to me even so real as a nightmare, Fräulein, that mechanical universe. But if I say this to you I must ask you also to see that Ludwig's own deeper thought dismisses it. Has not Ludwig himself placed life above law? And how much more must he place it above mindless machinery."

A strange sense of lightness and release passed over Persis while he spoke. Was not what he said self-evident? And how had she not seen it for herself? The cloud that had seemed so black was yet so thin, so impalpable, that at a mere breath it was dissolved. And now it was gone, and she could lift her head and look about her. This was not the time to ask herself where she was. Nor could she go on to ask Herr Sachs if he believed in sin and to ask him if she were a tempted woman. "It is always with Ludwig that you defend Ludwig," she said.

"Fortunately, it is easy to do so, Fräulein."

"If his deeper thought dismisses this theory, why should he not see it?—why should he cling so persistently to a nightmare?"

"You do not yet understand Ludwig, Fräulein. It is with him always the desire to surmount himself that explains his theories. That is the peril of his isolation, and of his courage. The most horrible thing his thought can show him, that he must believe in, that he must test himself upon. Unless he can brace his nature to accept and dominate it, he distrusts himself. It is an act of faith. To the spectre theory he says: 'Even so, I live, I will.' And see now," Sachs as he spoke turned on the bench so that he faced her, "see now, Fräulein;—this heroic act;—and then to have those he loves smile and say: 'Your courage is misplaced. This horror that you face is an illusion. Wave it away.'—Could he accept their verdict and not feel himself disintegrate?"

She had listened motionless, her eyes on the young man. "It is his pride," she said. "He wants horror."

"That is true, Fräulein," said Sachs. "But it is not a petty pride. It is for the sake of strength that he wants it, for the sake of self-conquest." And after a moment—and now it was as if, indeed, he read her thoughts—"It is because of his pride that Ludwig fears you."

"Fears me? What do you mean?"

"You are all the things, Fräulein, that Ludwig longs to be."

"What things?"

He leaned his chin on the hands that held his crutch and, looking down at the deep grass that rose about

their feet, he said: "You are hard, Fräulein, very hard, as you have said, and full of health and strength, like a young goddess, and the desire of life. And Ludwig is frail and gentle and shaken by pity, and at the bottom of his soul lies the renunciation of life, yes, the indifference to life which he so dreads. And the contrast is deeper still; for Ludwig's is a religious soul and yours a pagan. Yes, Ludwig would sacrifice himself and all he is and has to what he sees to be the highest; he makes his will one with it; he acclaims it as his own will. Is it not so with the man who has found the divine? But you, Fräulein, what you seek is your own happiness."

"Do you mean that Ludwig is good and I am wicked?" Persis asked.

He raised his head at this to consider her, too intent to give a smile to her ingenuous query.

"Ludwig is good, Fräulein. But you are not wicked. You are only young. Do you guess why I say all this to you—why I consent to sit here with you and talk of my friend?"

"Yes, I can guess. You feel that you may bring us together if you can make us understand one another. And you want to bring us together."

"You read me, Fräulein. I ask you to understand him better; but I also ask you to understand yourself, to see clearly where you stand. I ask you to be old—for yourself and for Ludwig—since he, too, is in this so young."

The strange vicarious insistence of his gaze was

upon her, a force—and how far away seemed now the memory of the gaze that was a weight pressing her down—a force that demanded painful effort from her. She murmured, "To see clearly?"

"Yes," said Sachs. "What is it that you have felt for Ludwig? Not love. Not even tenderness—or hardly that. It has been pride in his love, is it not so, Fräulein? and gladness because of your power over this great, child-like man. I do not blame you. You had no more to give—and he had not the power to win more from you. It is he, it is Ludwig, who has deceived both you and himself. For of what value can the discipleship of a child of nineteen be to Ludwig? Why should he expect in a month's time to mould an untrained mind to agreement? No, no, each of you, unconsciously, has deceived the other; it is not his doctrine that you care for, but his homage, and he is not the dispassionate master and philosopher, but your lover. And so it is that you wrangle together and find no happiness. You and Ludwig have nothing to do with each other—nothing—nothing—unless you can be man and wife."

She felt herself groping among strange shapes, strange, yet, in the underworld of her mind, the mute, sub-conscious region where the truth is known but not spoken, familiar. A chill fell upon her, a sense, after her sudden hope, of friendlessness and bereavement. Helplessly, she said, "But we have been quite quiet and happy for these last few days, Ludwig and I; we have had no wrangles. And I do care for his doc-

trines. I do want to learn. You are unfair to me. And though you find me so young, Ludwig needs me and I am of help to him."

"That is illusion, Fräulein," said Sachs. "You have a brilliant mind, I do not deny it, and you see the flaws and contradictions of his thought. Others, too, see them. To them he will not listen, how much less to you, his pupil. Ludwig does not argue with you; you do not seek the truth together. Do you not see, do you not know, that when he seems to teach you it is as if he were singing to you? They are nuptial plumage, Fräulein, that is all," Sachs faintly smiled, "these intellectual demonstrations."

Her tears had risen. "What am I to do, then, if it has all been a mistake?"

"But it is not all a mistake, Fräulein. One thing is sure, and that is that Ludwig loves you."

"He has never told me so!"

"But you know it," said Sachs, looking at her gravely. She had noticed before that symptoms of emotion left him singularly unmoved, unless that greater intentness of gaze was the sign of feeling. "You know the meaning of the song he sings though he puts to it words of another meaning."

"I do not feel its meaning, then; he does not make me feel it. If he does not make me feel it, what more can I do for him than I do now?"

"There are only two things that you can do for Ludwig, Fräulein. You can marry him, or send him away."

"Go to him and tell him that I will marry him when he has never told me that he loves me?" Persis cried, flushing brightly while the tears now fell.

"Not quite that, Fräulein. You could soon make Ludwig see that there was hope for him if you felt love for him."

"And marry him, then, to be his footstool, his pillow! Yes, that is all you mean! I am not fit to be his comrade, not fit to be his mental equal, and helper—I am only fit to be his wife! Oh, yes, Herr Sachs! that is your meaning. But those are German ideas. Not mine! Not ours!" She had started to her feet as she spoke, laughing angrily and brokenly through her tears, and a dim smile again flickered on Sachs's face as he rose and met her indignant eyes.

"A footstool is for stupid or brutal men, Fräulein; but a pillow—yes. It is a pillow that Ludwig needs, rest and quiet and kind arms about his head. And see, Fräulein," he looked at her now very gravely, "only so could you come to be Ludwig's comrade and helper. Only through happiness can he be won away from the spectres. When you have made him happy—then, ah then, I should have great hope of finding a change in Ludwig's dark theories."

As he spoke they heard a step approaching them over the grass and seeing the change on Sachs's face Persis knew that it was Lüdenstein's. In another moment he had joined them and had doffed his hat before her, his expression altering to one of solicitous inquiry as he noticed her tears. "Do I interrupt?"

he said. "I caught sight of the white glimmer of your dress among the trees and thought you were alone. I had hoped that to-day we might have a little music."

Persis dried her eyes. A mirthful, mocking mood took possession of her. "Let us have some music," she said. "Come, Herr Sachs; Graf von Lüdenstein will play us a Gigue by Bach, which I want you to hear with me. Do you know it? Partita in B flat. It sounds like the river as we hear it now from here; golden and flowing, like a shining stream, and golden apples fall into it. You will stay and listen?"

"I must not now stay longer, Fräulein."

"But I ask you," said Persis, fixing her eyes on him.

"I must not, Fräulein, indeed. I have much work to do."

She considered him for a moment. "And I have already kept you from it for too long. Good-bye, then. If Ludwig asks you, tell him that I waylaid you and kept you from your work."

"I will bear the responsibility for that, Fräulein," said Sachs very gravely as he bowed and turned away.

Lüdenstein, with whom she was thus left alone, was watching her. "I do not like to see you cry," he said. "What is it, may I ask?" He seemed to tower above her. It was, curiously, his size, the bulk and solidity of him, that was to her one of his most significant attributes. Ludwig was very nearly as tall, yet Ludwig's presence seemed an electric vibra-

tion in the air rather than a substance. To-day, though she had been abandoned, she seemed to hold a talisman against bulk and solidity. "Yes; you may ask," she said after a moment. "Herr Sachs told me that I ought either to marry Ludwig or to send him away."

"So. But that is drastic."

"Herr Sachs is not a person for half measures."

"An admirable father-confessor. And you will follow his advice?"

"I am very fond of Ludwig," said Persis after a pause. "I cannot marry him and I cannot send him away."

"Could you send me away?" Lüdenstein inquired smiling. They had begun to walk up the garden path.

She glanced at him and her glance was cold and armed. "Perhaps not. But it would not be because I am too fond of you."

"Because I am too fond of you, then?"

"That is more probable. You are an interest; an amusement."

They paused at the steps that led up to the salon. "And little Sachs?" Lüdenstein inquired; he showed no sign of discomfiture and it was part of his power, she recognised that clearly to-day when he seemed to have none over her, that he never met her on a basis of past admissions. He had never the faintest air of taking an advantage.

She looked at him now in some astonishment. "Herr Sachs?"

"Yes, Herr Sachs. Our little Parsifal," said Lüdenstein. "I make no attempt to hide my jealousy. Could anything make you part from him? Come now."

"I did not guess that you were jealous, too."

"Ah, but I am jealous, too, very jealous," said Lüdenstein laughing. "And let me say further that little Sachs does not play the game fairly. It is not for holy men to filch their friends' sweetmeats away from them."

She looked at him now with an ironic smile. "You know that that is not true."

"No. I do not know it."

"You know that it is not true," Persis repeated. "If I should ever marry Ludwig it will be because of Herr Sachs. Yes; and it is by no means impossible, let me tell you, that I shall marry Ludwig." Her indignation brought the words. Yet, now that they were uttered she felt nothing in them that she wished to retract. They seemed true.

Lüdenstein faintly flushed. For the first time she saw him discomposed. They stood at the foot of the steps and eyed each other. "You do not torment me, Fräulein Persis," he then said, and in his glance, too, there was irony, "as much as you perhaps imagine. No; do not misunderstand me, my immunity is based not on indifference, but on permanence.

Were you Ludwig's wife I should not feel more hopeless than I now do."

Persis's cheek had flamed. She found herself, as so often with this man, bewildered. Her skilful foil had been struck from her hand. "Ah, I see," she murmured. She began to mount the steps.

"And our music?" said Lüdenstein, smiling up at her as she stood above him. "I am to play to you to-day?"

"No. Not to-day, thank you." She looked over his head.

"I have displeased you too much? I have offended too much in my allusions to Herr Sachs? Such holy ground is not permitted to my feet?"

"I think that may be it," said Persis. "At all events I do not want to hear you play to-day." She left him standing there and went into the house.

CHAPTER XXVI

THAT afternoon Persis walked up to the woods. She went slowly, in the shade of her parasol, and the heat was pleasant to her and the balmy air part of her mood of lassitude. She felt, after all the stresses and terrors of the last weeks, dispossessed, and wanly convalescent. And though she knew that struggle lay before her and that her talk with Sachs that morning had been filled with admissions which, when she came to review them, might amaze her, she need not review them now. The breath had blown over her. The shadow was gone. And the menace of evil, too, had not that been put aside, a part of the shadow only? She did not want to think, but only to walk dreamily and to taste the sense of freedom and of life renewed.

She found the spot she sought; the bank under the tall trees where she and Ludwig had sat and talked together of their newly found friendship and he had told her of his life. She sat down on the bank, laid her parasol beside her and took off her hat. And presently she leaned back and rested her head in the deep grass and closed her eyes.

It was very still. The sunlight slanted from behind over the bank. When she glanced out between

her lashes she saw herself encompassed by green shadows as the light filtered down from the radiant sky through screens of verdure.—Fragrant, still, delicious. The Arctic rigors that had bound her heart were all melting and flowing from her in peaceful streams. Happy beginnings were in the dreamy calm. Her arm lay out upon the grass and she turned her palm to it so that she could feel its warmth and softness; so deep and warm, she found her thoughts drifting into a pleasant torpor and that, again, sank into oblivion. She was nearly asleep when she heard the sound of footsteps approaching her.

For a moment, overwhelming her peace with darkness, came the thought of Lüdenstein. She was ready to spring to her feet when she recognized the quick, light, nervous step and then, raising her lashes to a glimmer, saw that it was Ludwig himself who was coming up through the woodland. She was astonished, and then delighted. He was so much better. No doubt he had gone to the pension and her mother had told him to seek her here. It must be so. He had come to find her, and with the certainty some impulse kept her lying motionless. He would believe that she was asleep and she waited to see what he would do, finding her there.

The memory of her words to Sachs came to her: "He has never told me so." What had they not revealed—to him and to herself, they and her tears? He had never told her, and how could she know her heart until he did so. So she lay still and the presage

of solution, troubled, yet delicious, filled her. This would be the answer, the escape, the initiation; and in this spot, hallowed for them, the pettinesses, the bitternesses, the misunderstandings would fall away. He would tell her that he loved her and she would know that she loved him; dear, strange, absurd, beautiful Ludwig.

She closed her eyes now, for he had seen her and he drew near quickly. She heard him pause above her, looking down at her, and delight in her own loveliness, caught from his imagined delight, stirred in her breast. She knew, for the first time, a woman's intimate joy in her own beauty and, as she seemed to slumber, unaware and oblivious, she heard her heart, far below the happy tumult, heavily throbbing.

Wehlitz sank down on the grass beside her.

A long silence followed. It grew so long that Persis ventured another glimmer. He was not looking at her but up at the sky and trees. His uplifted profile, seen thus from below, was singularly candid and ingenuous. She had never seen him look so simply happy. Near them a bird piped three soft reiterated notes, so near that it seemed one might touch it with an out-stretched hand. The time of singing was long over; this was a musing call rather than a song, and after a little interval it was repeated. Wehlitz smiled, drawing a long breath.

A sense of almost heart-breaking pathos contracted the young girl's throat and filled her eyes with tears. The happiness of which Conrad had spoken seemed

as near them as the bird's soft call; they had only to put out a hand to touch it. She saw herself putting out the hand; stretching gentle arms to him and saying: "I know that you love me. I will take care of you, for the world, for your work, for ever." Her heart stood still as the vision came, so close was it to accomplishment. She seemed to hold back her hand, to hold her breath, to give herself a moment longer before putting all her life to the test. And as she paused, as she waited, she seemed to see herself and Ludwig returning to Tannenkreuz, affianced lovers. She saw herself the wife of the great man, the strange, mysterious genius. And then the picture of happy love seemed slowly to turn and to show her its prosaic yet ambiguous sequel. Ludwig and herself in a home together; Ludwig and herself at work, the sinister, inexorable loneliness of his thought shutting the world away, crushing them together in a tragic unity. How could she live with Ludwig? He was foolish and violent and suspicious and he looked like the little chemist in the dusty Italian town. Trivial fears, like a cloud of gnats, uprose above the deep fear and her mind drew back, denying, refusing to look; she saw herself, her hands before her face, fleeing as if from imminent peril. No, no, she could not hold out her hand. Then came a sense of void and darkness. She struggled with herself in a cold bewilderment. Oh! to recover the gladness of a little while ago! And now she argued with herself—or was it against Conrad? and was it not for Lud-

wig's sake?—"How can I judge of the sequel without the initiation? I do not know. I cannot know. If he will show himself my lover, now, all the future, from the one foothold of reality, will show itself so differently to me. What I must know is his love, his ardour, his delight." She caught her very thoughts to stillness then, for, as if in answer to her inner cry, she felt Ludwig stir as he sat beside her.

Now it had come. Now he would lean to her. She would hear his voice. He would plead, and smile, and tremble; and she, for all answer, would she not put up her arms to him? Yes; she would let him take her in his arms and kiss her. A bright colour flooded her face and throat. He leaned near her, and nearer still. And then, again, he was motionless.

A coolness had fallen across her cheek. She could interpret his movement. He had seen her flush and had shielded her from the sunlight. Her heart sank slowly from its loud beating and again the long green silence flowed about them. But now there seemed to lap into it, as if from a sluggish, subterranean river of darkness, all the lassitude, the weariness, the irritation of the past weeks. He did not intend to wake her. He did not intend to tell her that he loved her. There was to be no solution, no lifting wave of feeling. She opened her eyes. He was looking at the sky and she examined him fixedly, with a chill scrutiny. She counted for as much and as little in his happy mood as the bird and grass and sunlight. There was no ardour in his heart.

She stretched out her arms; they felt, curiously, as if she had been engaged in some exhausting physical conflict; she sighed and rubbed the backs of her hands over her eyes. And now, at last, when everything was over, everything too late, he looked down at her and smiled at her. She simulated a mild amazement.

"You have been asleep," he said, nodding. "You were sleeping when I came. And I have been watching you."

She propped her head on her hand and lay looking at him.

"Do you know what it has been?" Wehlitz went on, with the gentle, musing gaze, "*Feldeinsamkeit.* You remember the song of Brahms; the blissful dispersion of the soul in light and warmth and loneliness? See those clouds, Persis. They look, do they not, as if carved, ripple upon ripple, in thin chalcedony upon the blue. *Mein Gott!* what peace, what loveliness!"

His smile had left her. She had become, again, a part of the day's sweetness only. His eyes were lifted to the rippled sky and he was silent, well content to be so, needing nothing further.

It was, she saw it clearly, his inmost soul, innocent, Germanic, sweet and deep, its torturing Nessus-robe of thought fallen from it, and she hated herself, seeing his beauty; for she was far from her own soul, alienated, perverted with conflicting griefs. She wished to hide herself and weep.

His eyes returned to her at last. "And you were part of it, your sleeping face, Persis," he said. "The face of one dear to us, who sleeps, is very touching. It becomes holy in its helplessness, its strange, secret strength. I could weep over the sleeping face of one I love; but to-day the tears would have been happy tears. You have had joyful dreams as I watched over you, my little Persis?"

She was filled with shame, overwhelming shame. An older woman could have read with a more tolerant comprehension her own impulses. To her girlish heart, turned against itself, her pretended sleep, seen in contrast with his trust, took on the guise of an unworthy coquetry; and that she should see him as so beautiful, yet feel the beauty as a wrong, this was a deeper unworthiness. The bitter scorn that welled up in her was for herself rather than for him, yet it involved them both. "No; I have not dreamed," she said, hearing the curious dryness of her voice. "My empty sleep was n't at all holy." She sat up, took her hat upon her knees and pulled out its ribbons.

"Ah, but no sleep is empty; it listens, it journeys, it gathers power. You are tired, displeased, Persis? I woke you, though I sat so quietly?"

She was afraid that she must break into tears, and saw his peace, like the stillness of the rippled sky, invaded by a town's shrill tumult. Fretfully she replied: "No; oh, no; you did n't wake me. Displeased? Why should I be displeased?" and rising

she tied the ribbons of her hat under her chin. Through the misery and disarray of her thought ran the longing, rootless, hopeless, yet importunate, that he might understand—understand better than she herself could do—and rise and take her in his arms. But, not moving, he looked up at her and his eyes seemed at once to darken and to become dulled. They dwelt on her with their normal sad intensity, yet they withdrew from her. "I do not know. You seemed displeased with me. You are going back to the town?"

She took out the little watch tucked in the ribbon at her waist, swallowing hard on a rising sob. "Yes. It is four o'clock. Mamma will be expecting me back for tea."

The muscle in his cheek began to twitch. He smiled ironically. "We are very considerate of Mamma when we wish to leave our friends."

"I thought that you were coming back, too," said Persis, coldly. Her heart seemed broken.

"But no, but no," Wehlitz replied as coldly, leaning his elbow in the grass and turning his eyes from her. "Why should I go back when I have only just come away? I came to think, to be at peace and alone."

"Since you came to be alone, you must not say that I make pretexts for leaving my friends," said Persis, turning away, but slowly, and looking about her as if uncertain which path to take.

His eyes followed her. "You go then. Good.

It is well. Is it Lüdenstein to-day you are to meet, or Conrad? It must, unless I am much mistaken, be a rendezvous with one or the other that bids you hasten, rather than Mamma. Good. May it be a pleasant *tête-à-tête.*"

This was his real self, too, this triviality, this folly, this jealousy founded on the claim of no ardour. Yet she had the feeling of a guilty creature as she slowly walked away, making no reply.

CHAPTER XXVII

SIGNORINA ZARDO had spent that morning with Wehlitz. He was much better and she felt no surprise, on returning in the afternoon, to hear that he had gone out. Doubtless it had been to find Persis, whom he had not seen since the evening before. She was engaged in writing a number of business letters for her friend and sitting down at the table she went on with her work until the sun slanted in over her papers. She rose then, to pull down the blind and, as she stood at the window, saw Ludwig slowly mounting the steps of the terrace beneath; from his gaze, as he raised his eyes to her, a profound melancholy reached her.

Of all her many unfortunate or troubled friends Wehlitz was the one whose welfare lay closest to Signorina Zardo's heart. She seemed to see him, always, walking on the verge of perils from which her own hand was too feeble to withhold him and to pray that some stronger hand would be stretched forth to draw him to safety; as if one watched, helplessly, a somnambulist silhouetted tragically against the sky and knelt in the street below, silent and supplicating. "Ah! *il povero!*" she murmured now, running to the door to receive him, and as his dragging step came

along the corridor and he appeared before her, she exclaimed: "But my friend! what does this mean? Where have you been? You have exhausted yourself."

He crossed the room and threw himself into the chair near the window and for some moments, as he sat gazing out at the bright, soft evening he did not answer her question. Only after she had repeated, with urgency, "Ludwig, where have you been?" did he say; "I have been to the woods. It is true; I am exhausted."

"Ah; it was too far to go, on your first day of real convalescence. Your hand burns, as if you were feverish again."

He did not look at her, though, passively, he allowed her to take his hand and left it lying between hers. Eleanora was almost in tears. Presently, turning his dull eyes to the table, he said, pointing to a roll of manuscript that the post had brought: "From Volmar, that must be. May I see it?"

She handed the parcel to him and he opened it, drawing out a letter and the corrected proofs of his great work. He had sent them some days ago to this distinguished man, a former associate of his at the University. When Wehlitz had read the letter, which was short, a sickly flush covered his face and for some moments he sat in silence, gazing at the wall before him; then, handing it to Eleanora, he said: "The last nail in the coffin of a friendship," and turned his eyes again on the trees outside.

Signorina Zardo read. The letter expressed, coldly and concisely, its writer's reprobation and repugnance.

"Dull, dull, dull man!" Signorina Zardo murmured. She stole a glance at Wehlitz, aghast indeed, for Volmar's judgment was a power in Europe.

"Yet the kick of a jackass can kill," he commented. "My book is dead."

"No, Ludwig; no, no, no—that is *une idée noire.*" Signorina Zardo laid the letter back upon the table, forcing her tones to good cheer. "His is a mind fixed in its own formulas, hardened in its scholastic mould. You cannot expect understanding from such as he. Wait, Ludwig, wait, till the young minds of Europe have heard your voice. Then you will gather your laurels."

"I shall never gather laurels. They may come, but they will be bound upon a skull," said Wehlitz, and his flat, quiet voice alarmed his old friend more than violence would have done. "And I ask for no laurels. I ask for but one loving and understanding heart. Young minds? What of the mind of Conrad? He loves me—so he says—and he does not understand. What of the mind of your Persis? Ah," he slightly laughed, "there is one who neither understands nor loves."

"Persis? You say this of Persis?" cried Signorina Zardo, amazed. "Did I not see you together, only last evening, and all was well with you? How can you speak so of one who truly loves you?"

"It is easy for you women to talk of love," said Wehlitz, with his smile of sickly irony, "and easy for you to receive it—but to feel it, no. I do not speak of you, Eleanora, you are not as other women. I speak of Persis. Hers is a hard heart and there is no love for me in it. It is, I sometimes think, my great misfortune to have met her." And suddenly, turning his face to Signorina Zardo's shoulder, he leaned it there, saying: "I am lonely, Eleanora. I am lonely, and very unhappy."

"Ludwig! Ludwig! My poor friend! What has happened?" She bent over him with murmurs of compassion and entreaty. "Tell me what has happened. Let me know. Do not judge her so hardly. This is a misunderstanding; a lover's quarrel, Ludwig."

He shook his head, still keeping his face hidden on her shoulder. "No; no lover's quarrel. She does not love me. She will never love me."

"Why do you say so? Why do you think so? You know what I feel for you, and for her, Ludwig. That you should find each other was one of my deepest hopes. It breaks my heart to hear you speak like this."

"I have seen her," said Wehlitz, with difficulty. "I found her in the woods and we spoke together. No; I cannot tell you. She mocks me. She mocks my tenderness for her. She despises me. I am ridiculous in her eyes, and she makes me ridiculous in my own. It must end, Eleanora." His voice had

changed. He raised his head. "It must end. I shall leave Tannenkreuz."

"But you have explained nothing, Ludwig," Eleanora cried. "Wait. Do not be so hasty. You misjudge Persis; I feel that you are unfair to her. There is some misunderstanding here."

He looked at her sombrely. "You will defend her, and Conrad will defend her. You all conspire to throw the blame on me. Well, so be it. Hers is the noble heart and mine the mean one. So be it. I am well accustomed to my solitude." As he spoke there was a tap at the door, and Eleanora, turning quickly, breathed:

"It will be Persis herself—come to make all right. She was to have had tea with us to-day. You will remember."

But as Ludwig cried out, in a voice curiously blended of fear and hope, "Come in!" it was Lüdenstein who entered.

He paused on the threshold to glance from one to the other of the strained faces.

Wehlitz started to his feet. "Enter! enter, Ernst!" he cried with a laugh that seemed to dangle in mid air like some galvanized hanging creature. "Come in! It is too long since we have had one of our good talks! Sit down—that chair—and take your pipe. The Signorina permits, as we know. I have heard a jackass bray this evening, Ernst, loudly, in my ear. See—give him the letter, I beg of you, Eleanora. See what Volmar writes to me. It is in-

telligent, as you will find. A crack of the whip at his heels will be my fitting answer."

Lüdenstein had crossed the room and sunk in his accustomed place, and, as he opened and read the letter, Wehlitz stood grasping the back of his chair with both hands, keeping feverish eyes upon his friend. Eleanora also fixed Graf von Lüdenstein with a steady, contemplative gaze.

"No; it is not intelligent," he commented, smiling and glancing up from the letter which he then tossed back upon the table. "Waste no lashes upon him, my friend. He will not care to stray again into your mountain pastures; the savour of their pungent herbs is not one that his fat paunch can digest. Let the colic that this letter so accurately expresses be his punishment."

Wehlitz laughed loudly. "Aha! Well said! Well said, Ernst! The Colic-Giver! My new title! I dispense gripes and writhings to our plethoric, flatulent Europe. Ah, you are a man after my own heart, Ernst," he continued to laugh his loud, mirthless laugh. "And now you can do me another service. The Signorina and I were talking of Fräulein Fennamy and of my suit to her. You see her often, Ernst. You have just come from her, is not that so? What do you feel as to my chances? As a loyal friend, Ernst. Come, as a loyal friend."

He had ceased to laugh. Lüdenstein, filling his pipe, looked at him with half-closed eyes. "I did

not know that you still courted Fräulein Fennamy, Ludwig," he observed.

"You did not know that I courted her? You did not know that I hope to make her my wife?" Wehlitz spoke with sharpened accents. "Has she told you that there is no hope for me?"

"By no means. You are mistaken if you think that the Fräulein makes confidences to me. When we meet it is for music, or I am sent by you to her, as it was the other day, you will remember. I can barely count myself a friend. No; I have not come from the Pension Müller, but I went there this morning, hoping for an hour of music, and she dismissed me. She had work to do, she said."

Wehlitz had come round his chair and sank into it, looking intently at his friend and repeating: "She dismissed you. She had work to do. There was no music to be had to-day."

For a little time after this there was silence, broken only by the meditative puffs of Lüdenstein's pipe, the creaking of Eleanora's silk bodice as she breathed and the soft tap-tap of Wehlitz's finger-nails on the arm of his chair. The pipe presently drew with a little sputtering sound, and taking it from between his teeth to press the tobacco in and to relight it, Lüdenstein pursued laconically: "But if you wish for authoritative information as to the state of Fräulein Fennamy's feelings, Ludwig, it is to friend Sachs that you should address your inquires. He is her father-confessor, and has often, I imagine, a penitent to

counsel and console. So it must have been this morning when I found them so cunningly hidden in the orchard. She was weeping, and there had evidently been a scene of much emotion between them." The pipe drew clearly; Lüdenstein puffed gently at it between his sentences, his eyes fixed on the trees outside. A deep flush mounted to Wehlitz's face.

"They are friends, good friends," he said, thickly, after a moment's silence. "And Conrad is my emissary to her when I cannot go myself. Weeping? Why was she weeping? Tell me what you saw!"

"How can I tell you why she wept?" said Lüdenstein, slightly smiling. "I am not her father-confessor. No, he could not this morning have been your emissary, for she desired him to tell you, did you question him, that it was she who had waylaid and taken him from his work. It is at the grille, at the foot of the garden, that she waits for him."

"Speak plainly!" Wehlitz cried, with a sudden dismaying violence. The veins were swollen in his neck and forehead, and he started forward, grasping both arms of his chair as if to restrain himself. "Speak plainly! What do you know? She loves him! Have I not suspected it! Together they mock at me and my doctrines!"

"Calm, my friend; calm," said Lüdenstein gravely, raising his hand. "Do not rush so rapidly to conclusions so crude. Yes. I will speak plainly, and I am glad that you give me this opportunity for frankness. All that I should wish to say to you, Ludwig,

is this: if you must send an emissary to a woman, let it be a rake rather than a Parsifal."

"A rake rather than a Parsifal?" Fallen back in his chair, Wehlitz looked from Lüdenstein to Eleanora with a sort of bewilderment.

"Precisely," said Lüdenstein, nodding. "How could you expect your courtship to flourish in such hands? His feeling for her you were at once aware of. Love? It is nothing so commonplace and nothing so wholesome, this self-deceiving sublimation of instinct. There is no conscious treachery to you; dismiss the idea of such a thing. Could he make his appeal to her if he were not the veritable saint? It is her soul, my friend, her soul he seeks to sustain and lift, and what woman since the world began was ever able to resist that finest flattery of being told that she had a soul—and a soul precious to its discoverer? You could not deal in these delicate comfits, my poor Ludwig. No; I make no accusations. I advise you, that is all, if you still hope to make Fräulein Fennamy your wife, to send Parsifal packing."

Sunken in his chair, Wehlitz gazed starkly at his friend. Eleanora unfolded her arms as if with precaution and clasped her hands tightly together in her lap.

"I perceive," Lüdenstein added, turning his eyes on her with a slight bow, "that what I say is no news to the Signorina."

"You all deceive me!" shouted Wehlitz. Elea-

nora for a moment had kept a silence that might be construed as helpless. He raised himself in his chair and turned to confront her. "You are all conspired to deceive me! What is it, then, that you, too, know? Where is it that you, too, have seen them cunningly hidden? What is it that they say of me? Speak! This is the time for plain speech—if there is any friendship for me in your heart!"

"I am grieved, grieved, grieved, Ludwig," said Eleanora in a low voice. "And you know that I do not speak of these matters except to you alone."

"But you must speak now in Lüdenstein's presence! If what he says is false—refute it!"

"A half-truth is difficult to refute, Ludwig; Graf von Lüdenstein's is that only, if as much as that. Did I not implore you at the time to pay your suit to Persis in person and to send no deputy? And did not Herr Sachs implore you? It is untrue—untrue—what Graf von Lüdenstein says of Herr Sachs, and he knows it, and you should know it too. He does not hide with her. He does not filch her heart from you—that would be the deed of a far different man; and if she has come to depend too much upon him—whose is the fault? Why do you not win her as your wife?" And slightly panting now from the accumulated impetus of her speech, the good woman added, casting a glance of open hostility upon Lüdenstein: "And of Graf von Lüdenstein's insinuations I will only say that if some, it may be true, deceive

themselves, for others no such excuses can be offered."

"It is only self-deceivers who are in need of excuses, Signorina," Lüdenstein returned. He had, during her speech, smiled with an air of quiet relish. "What do I say that you have not said also? I warn Ludwig—as you, unless I misunderstand you, warn him—that he should make love himself, and not send others to console for the lack of love-making. And if we must not speak of love, I see, too, as you do, that if Fräulein Fennamy is to have a father-confessor it would be well that he should at least teach the same creed as Ludwig's. A mind so young as Fräulein Fennamy's may well become confused if Herr Sachs, on the one hand, is engaged in rescuing her from the teachings that Ludwig, on the other, seeks to impart. One may steal minds as well as hearts; and there is more than one way of stealing hearts. Bah!"—throwing back his head he laughed softly. "These religious cravings of the female heart! Have you not yourself, Ludwig, with your delicate sense of irony, laid bare again and again these lures of nature? That longing to draw close—close to the saint, to look deep into his eyes—to weep upon his shoulder? What does it mean—what has it always meant but the mask of desire? Our young Fräulein is passionless, it is true, cold with the arid coldness of her pinchbeck race. There are but two ways of winning such a woman. One is through her vanity; her ambition, the other through her reli-

gious instincts; and they, indeed, are but another form of that insatiable vanity which is woman. I speak in commonplaces. Is not history their embodiment? Send him away, Ludwig, send your Quasimodo Parsifal away, and then show the Fräulein an idealized portrait of herself, or else equip yourself with worldly potency. Place her high. Set her foot upon the neck of others. Only so will you win her. Never, Ludwig, never, as the scrupulous, passionless, impoverished professor. Why, is it not as plain as day? I speak to you as a friend." He had spoken, indeed, with full gravity and even with an unaccustomed bitterness, and rising he knocked out the ashes of his pipe against the stove, avoiding the smouldering glance of his stricken friend. Glancing at Eleanora, he murmured: "It is now the Signorina's turn, and I perceive from her demeanour that she will not spare the calumniator of her sex. Believe me, *gnädiges Fräulein,* in all that I have said, I hold you a shining exception." He bowed before her and left them.

Some moments passed before Wehlitz turned his eyes upon Eleanora. She met them with resolution. But, after the encounter, bending his head upon his arms, he murmured: "I shall go mad. Between you all you will drive me mad."

"My Ludwig," said Eleanora. She came to him and sat down beside him. "Listen to me. Courage! Do not let dark thoughts come. You are overstrained—overweary, that is all. Listen to me, Lud-

wig. It is true. I could not speak before that man. An evil man; do you not feel it? Oh, he is not fit to tread in the footprints of little Sachs, and he seeks to part you from him. And why does he seek it, Ludwig? Why? He is jealous; he is devouringly jealous of Sachs and of the bond that unites him to Persis. Could a soul such as his understand such a bond? It is laughable! With his talk of Parsifals! I scorn him!" Tears had come, and she paused only to dash them away while Ludwig, still, lay like a wrecked thing. "Listen, Ludwig," she went on, laying her hand upon his shoulder. "Be calm. Is it not clear to you that he himself loves Persis and would win her from you and Sachs? From the first, from the first day they met, I read his mind. Her mother, too, read it. Annetta saw with me. And you, my hawk-sighted Ludwig, were not so blinded; you, too, suspected; you, too, saw in his eyes as they rested on her the cold appraisement of the libertine. And now he bides his time in the hope of sowing dissension between you and Persis, and you and Sachs, and of making her his victim. Ah! if she were another woman, I might tremble for her, for he has power and charm and skill. But I know Persis. He amuses her only, and his music pleases her; that is all. No, Ludwig, her heart is yours. Yours, I repeat it, whatever may have passed between you today. And the time has now come for courage, determination, ardour. You heard his sneer; you heard what he said of you—the passionless professor. He

does not believe you capable of winning a woman's heart! Laugh at him and at his sneers! Prove to him how little he knows of you—judging as he does by gross standards. Woo her; woo her yourself, Ludwig. You will win her; I answer for it that you will win her. Ah! it is propitious. Here is our good, our trusted friend, Herr Sachs himself!"

Wehlitz raised his head; his eyes, dazed with their long hiding, blinked rapidly as he fixed them upon Conrad. Without speaking, he watched him as he advanced into the room and took his place at the table.

"Herr Sachs will uphold me in all that I have said," Signorina Zardo murmured. Ludwig's demeanour alarmed her.

"Herr Sachs is in the good graces of the ladies, as we know," said Wehlitz, smiling. "Well, and when did you last see your interesting young friend, Conrad? I may ask? I make no claim to be admitted to your secret conferences."

Sachs looked at him with grave attention. "I saw Fräulein Fennamy this morning, Ludwig," he replied.

"Ah! you are frank; a brave, honest creature. *Eine gute Haut.* You would hide nothing from your friend. You spoke of me? Perhaps this, too, I may learn from you."

"We spoke of you; yes," Sachs looked down now at the table.

"And what did you have to say of me, eh? Good things, Conrad? Good, friendly things?"

"I found Fräulein Fennamy somewhat perplexed

and distressed, Ludwig. Your lack of trust in her disturbs her; your jealousy. I explained to her that these difficulties arose from your devotion to her and that it was natural that you should distrust other influences in her life—my influence, for instance. I do not think that you would have found anything to complain of in what was said of you."

At this, for some moments, there was silence.

"And she?" Wehlitz presently asked.

"What she feels, I think, Ludwig, is that a more perfect devotion would show more trust. She feels in your demands upon her a menace to her freedom."

"Her freedom!" Wehlitz sneeringly laughed. "The freedom of the female! If I could impose my will upon our despicable civilization, that freedom would consist in moving from the hearth to the cradle and back again!"

"I am afraid it is this instinct in you that the Fräulein detects and resents," Sachs commented with some dryness. "If what you say is true, why do you waste your time in teaching your philosophy to her?"

Wehlitz now turned his head away and looked out of the window. "I do not need that taunt from you," he said presently. "I teach her philosophy because she will not consent to be my wife."

"I do not taunt you," said Sachs gently.

There was silence again for a little while. Sachs twisted and untwisted the fringes of the mat that lay beneath the lamp. His face, while they had spoken, had dully flushed. "Why do you say that she will

not marry you, Ludwig?" he said at length. "That is not a correct way of putting it. You have never asked her to marry you. May this not explain much of the trouble now between you?"

"Ah! But that is what I wished to ask you!" Eleanora cried. "That is what I was saying to Ludwig as you came in! He loves her, yet he has never wooed her. What woman's heart was ever won in such a fashion? How can he know what is in her heart for him?"

"I go further, signorina," said Sachs. "How can she know what is in her own heart?"

"Her heart?" Wehlitz repeated. His voice had changed. Its irony and bitterness were gone. "There is no love for me in her heart. Did I not see it, clearly, at last, to-day? Kindness sometimes, and admiration sometimes, and sometimes pity; but love never. How can I speak of love to a heart so hard? It is only to love that love can speak." He leaned his head down on his arms.

Sachs and Eleanora exchanged glances of profound anxiety.

"You will rest now, Ludwig," said Eleanora, rising. "You are overworn. You will rest, and Herr Sachs will sit beside you and keep you company."

"No, no; I will be alone," said Wehlitz in a muffled voice.

"But," said Eleanora after a pause, in which her eyes and Sachs's again sought mutual counsel, "you

will go to bed, will you not? You will try to get some sleep?"

"I will go to bed. I shall hope to sleep," he repeated dully.

She laid her hand upon his shoulder. "That is well, Ludwig. That is well; and when you have slept you will see that all these dark thoughts are phantoms. You will be strong again, you will be yourself. And, Ludwig, I beseech you, delay no longer. Go yourself to Persis and ask her yourself to marry you. Yes; to-morrow. Let this uncertainty and misunderstanding end."

"I will not ask her to marry me," said Wehlitz. "I do not wish to marry her. We do not love each other."

Signorina Zardo stood above him, taken aback.

Suddenly he raised his head. "Do not be troubled," he said. "I shall sleep well. I am not the man to be brokenhearted over a brittle girl. You will come to-morrow, Eleanora, and help me again with my letters? Yes? There is still much to do. And Conrad has his researches to continue in the heart of Fräulein Fennamy. We must not interrupt him; no; that would be a pity. We must not take the services of her father-confessor from her."

"Ludwig! Ludwig!" said Eleanora in a low voice of pain and reprobation.

But rising and sweeping his hand at them, though still he did not turn his eyes on Sachs, he cried: "I will hear no more! I am ill! I am exhausted! If

I am to do my work, I must have peace! And my work is still of value to the world!—yes, though you may all laugh at it! Good-night to you now. I have no more time to waste in talk of love-affairs."

"If you wish it, Ludwig, if you wish it, yes," Eleanora murmured, casting a frightened glance upon him. Tip-toeing with discretion, as though in a sick room, she moved towards the door, Conrad, pale and heavy and with downcast eyes, following her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. FENNAMY dressed and came down earlier than was her wont next morning. Persis had breakfasted in bed, and there had been no temptation to loiter over coffee and rolls. It was a wet day, too, and the sound of the south-western rain dashing against her window-panes had depressed the little lady. Ten o'clock, therefore, saw her exchanging comments on the weather with the major in the salon. Here Eleanora came to seek her, and Mrs. Fennamy looked with some anxiety at her friend's face as she laid a hand upon her arm and drew her into the sitting-room. She seemed not to have slept. She was haggard and dishevelled, and had evidently been crying.

"The only thing," Mrs. Fennamy objected, as Eleanora closed the sitting-room door upon them, "is that Persis and Herr Wehlitz will want to have their lesson here this morning. He 's up again, you know. He came here yesterday afternoon and went up to the woods to find her."

"He will not come this morning, Annetta," said Signorina Zardo. "I should not be surprised if you were never to see Ludwig Wehlitz again."

Mrs. Fennamy, who had seated herself at the table, looked at her in surprise. "Why, what 's happened, Eleanora?" she inquired.

Resting her elbows on her knees, as she sat on the sofa, Eleanora covered her face with her hands. "I do not know what has happened," she said. "All that I know is that she has hurt him, hurt him cruelly, and that to-day he refuses to see either me or Herr Sachs. Oh, my blame is not only for Persis; the wrong lies deeper. For, at the beginning, her girl's heart turned to him, and he was robbed of it."

"Robbed of it?" Mrs. Fennamy again inquired. "How do you mean, Eleanora?"

Signorina Zardo now rose and walked up and down the little room. She held her handkerchief to her eyes. "It is you," she said. "It is you, Annetta! You have broken and destroyed him. Had it not been for you she might have loved him."

"Well, I never!" Mrs. Fennamy mildly ejaculated. Her eyes followed Eleanora with solicitude.

"You cannot deny it! You cannot deny it, Annetta! Not if you are honest with yourself!"

"I never thought him attractive physically, if that 's what you mean," said Mrs. Fennamy after a moment.

"Attractive! Physically! Yes! it is what I mean," said Eleanora. "How is a young girl to fall in love if there is no physical attraction? What is physical attraction but an infection, a suggestion, the subtlest, most derivative of feelings? A girl may be

turned towards or from a man by a glance of admiration or irony."

To this Mrs. Fennamy nodded assent. "That 's perfectly true, Eleanora," she said. "I 've often thought so and how queer and dreadful it is, in a way, to think that these important things in life are more like cobwebs than like the bonds of steel people imagine. All the same, you know," she continued, "I don't think it 's quite fair to say I was ironic. He often surprised me very much and seemed to me very foolish; but I never felt ironic exactly. I just did n't admire him; that was all. And if it was that that kept Persis from falling in love with him, I can't say I 'm sorry for it, you know, though I 'm as sorry as can be for Herr Wehlitz."

"No; you are not sorry," said Eleanora. She still walked up and down, but her tears had ceased and her arms hung dolefully at her sides. "You have no regret or pity. Your heart is like your child's, a hard one. Yet it would have redeemed and made him whole, that desolate man. He needed only the touch, the look. Love; the simple, tender things; they were there beneath his hand, and you robbed him of them— you, Annetta, with your childishness and your small marionette's vision. Had Persis been alone in Tannenkreuz this autumn, Ludwig would have won her."

There was silence after this for a little while. Eleanora had gone to stand beside the window from whence she gazed out with her tear-worn eyes, unseeingly, into the wet day, and Mrs. Fennamy sat at

the table, meditating, quite without resentment. "If it 's true, Eleanora," she said at last, "if it 's true that I influenced Persis without trying to, it 's his own fault, too, that he has n't won her. He 's worn her out. If he 'd let his theories more alone and made love to her like any other man, she might have taken him in spite of everything you say I did."

Eleanora looked out into the street. "He could not be like another man, Annetta," she said, and now with a deep melancholy from which all accusatory violence had passed away. "I, too, saw that his difference from other men was to lose her to him. It was her mind she gave him to win, and it was his appeal to her, his charm, his weapon, that he wished to win her mind. He showed her the philosopher, when he was in reality the lover, because she had led him to believe that it was the philosopher she valued. If she could have loved him she would have released the lover. If beauty could have kissed the beast, the prince, freed from his enchantment, would have stepped forth. Now, all is too late." But, as she spoke these last words Eleanora's gaze had become fixed and lighted. "Annetta!" she said, after a moment.

"Yes? What is it?" Mrs. Fennamy asked. She rose and came to stand beside her friend. A dark figure, bent beneath a wet and wind-buffeted umbrella, was slowly approaching down the street. They watched it.

"It is Ludwig," said Signorina Zardo. She turned

to look into her friend's eyes. "It is Ludwig," she repeated.

Mrs. Fennamy had faintly coloured. "So perhaps it is n't all too late," she said gently.

"That was why he would not see us," Eleanora murmured. She clasped her hands on her breast. "And he is coming now to put all to the test. He is coming to woo her himself." She caught her friend by the hand and drew her rapidly away from the window. "Quick," she breathed. "Quick. He must not find us here. He must not know that he is not alone."

CHAPTER XXIX

PERSIS had just finished dressing when she was told that Herr Wehlitz was waiting for her below. It was eleven, an hour later than their usual time, and a dark presage had weighed on her while she slowly moved about her room. She had expected that he would not come, yet to have the hour pass by and to know expectation fulfilled, had been like a punishment measured out drop after drop. She thought of the scene of yesterday with a sick self-disgust. She had been cruel to him, and she deserved to lose him. Yet now, when she knew that he was waiting for her, there mingled with the deep relief—a deep weariness—with herself, rather than with Ludwig; with all the intricacy of the baffling, enmeshing situation. And worse than all, a dark embarrassment surged up over her, suffocatingly, as she went down to meet him.

His appearance, as she entered the little sitting-room, startled her. He seemed shrunken, dusty; he had the piteous shrivelled look of a mummy, something measurelessly old and helpless. Even the fierceness of his eyes seemed extinguished; they were like two spots of bitumen in the mummy's face. She gave

him her hand, murmuring "Good-morning," and, without speaking, he quickly withdrew it and turned away from her to the table where their books were piled.

She came and stood at the other side of the table, also looking down at the books. "Ludwig, I am so sorry about yesterday," she said, while the hot colour rose in her cheeks. "I was horrid to you; I don't know why—I must have been sleepy. I am often ill-tempered when I wake."

For a moment he said nothing, ranging the books in the way habitual to him; then in a dry voice he answered: "I grant you my forgiveness."

She was disconcerted by this reception of her act of penitence. She sat down and drew the books towards her. Wehlitz remained standing. "Persis," he said, "we have come to a crisis in our relationship." His voice was curious; an automatic voice; the voice of the mummy galvanised to speak. The sunken eyes fixed on her filled her with discomfort. "Have we?" she murmured.

"A crisis," Ludwig repeated. "You must know it, too. It racks me. There was pain before and uncertainty; not this sinister darkness. It must end. And I have come this morning to ask you whether you have for me another answer than the one you sent to me, now six weeks ago, by Conrad."

She sat there amazed. "Another answer?"

"Another answer. Will you marry me? Yes or no? I ask it now myself."

She had risen from her chair. "Why do you ask me that now? Like this?"

"I ask you because I must know. I ask you because we must dally no longer. Do you love me? Will you marry me?" He was trembling. He rapped with his knuckles on the table as he spoke.

"But we were to be friends, devoted friends. You accepted my answer. You agreed to what I offered then."

Wildly, violently, raising his hand, he shook the words away. "No—no—no. It is not what I asked—what I ask. My wife—security—peace. Will you marry me? Yes or no. I send no deputy now with my question."

Only some desperate determination in which he tested his own strength had carried him so far. He spoke with an automatic fierceness in which was no ardour and no hope. Persis looked away from him.

"I cannot marry you," she said in a dull voice.

There was silence for some moments. After the effort with which he had launched himself upon this final venture a heavy confusion fell upon him. She read in his averted face and fixed eyes the sick depths of his wounded vanity. His demeanour dismissed a horrid surmise. He had not, that was evident, guessed at her secret expectations of yesterday, reconstructing, after her departure, her mysterious behaviour. No; that affront had not been offered, though this belated proposal, prompted, it seemed, by hostility rather than by love, was almost an affront.

The silence, however, continued, and she began to feel pity for him. "I am so sorry that there should have been any misunderstanding, Ludwig," she said. "I hope that it need not harm our friendship. I am ready to go on, you know, as your true friend."

Still he did not speak, picking up and looking at one of the books. "A true friend," he then repeated in a dry and clipping voice. "A very true friend indeed. I ask nothing better in life than a true friend."

His manner angered her, but she controlled her resentment. She still was very sorry for him. "Well, you have one. Shall we begin? I have been studying every day since your illness."

"Ah! I am proud of my devoted pupil." He seated himself opposite her, and turned the pages of his book. "You have finished reading this, as I desired you to do?"

"Oh, yes; some days ago. Here are my notes." She handed him the sheaf.

Wehlitz appeared to peruse them with close attention. "Oh yes, I see," he murmured. He looked up at her. "And these studies have made clear to you the mathematical certainties underlying my doctrine?"

Her eyes met his, and now, indeed, he might read something like fear in them. By some deep instinct of his writhing vanity he had leaped to his most fundamental self-assertion. This was not the moment for dispassionate sincerity. "Which doctrine do you mean?" she asked feebly, temporising.

"Which doctrine? Can you ask? The Eternal Return of all things. Yes, Persis," and now, at last, his eyes rested darkly on her and with a bitter smile, "again and again, to all eternity, you and I shall meet in this small, dull room, and to all eternity you will tell me that you cannot marry me. It is a sportive doctrine, as you will have perceived; a doctrine fitted to give good cheer and breathe a stout heart into us. And I laugh back at it—scorn for scorn! It is clear to you, I ask, that necessity?"

No; it was not the moment for dispassionate sincerity; yet was it the moment for the evasions of pity and compunction? "What seems to me most clear is that freedom, not necessity, is your doctrine," she said. "They can be reconciled, I am sure."

His eyes were on her, fixed. "Reconciled? I do not deal in paps and sops and reconciliations."

"Do not misunderstand me," she murmured.

He had become very pale. "Misunderstand you? I understand you. And I understand why, to-day, I find you ashamed to meet my glance. These are Conrad's thoughts, not yours."

"Ludwig, there is a discrepancy in your thought. You say that I am your comrade, your helper. Let us talk frankly together; let us see, together, if we cannot make your real meaning clear."

"My comrade! You! You are my enemy! These are Conrad's words! You have talked of this with Conrad!"

"I tell you that I saw the discrepancy for myself."

His eyes were flaming as though her words had held a torch to them. "For yourself!" he echoed, loudly laughing. "A woman think for herself! No, no, my child! You are steeped in Conrad's thought—finding mine too cold and stormy! You lave yourself in Conrad's tepid waters; they are comforting, are they not?—soft, scented soap-suds! The thought of a mere, poor, truthful philosopher who deals only in icy sea-water has no chance against scented soap-suds!"

She looked down, flushed and sombre. "No one sees your strength so clearly as Conrad. He has shown it to me. I could not have seen it for myself—there is that truth in what you say."

"He has shown it to you! I am obliged to him! And he has, with the strength, shown you the discrepancies—or, no—those, you tell me, you discovered for yourself! Ah! he interprets me to you and tells you that my necessity is freedom, and my rigour love. Tell him from me that in my world there is no place for the double-faced, no place for weaklings who dare not face the truth!"

A faint smile now flitted on her face. It veiled the nervous tremor with which his violence affected her, but it revealed her scorn. "It is strange that you should find Conrad weak. He seems to me the strongest person I have known. He has the greatest strength; the strength that dares love weakness."

"False! False! False!" Wehlitz cried, almost

sobbing, beside himself with grief and anger. "He is a hypocrite! a double-faced hypocrite! and he has stolen you from me! Strength! Yes, his is the sly, writhing strength of the worm—the plebeian strength! Faugh! did I not see it from the first in the thick, coarse features, the eyes holding the mean patience of all the lowly generations that have gone to the making of him! Yes, Fräulein Fennamy, and more still—since we are speaking plainly—let me tell you my further thought of your devotion to this bourgeois. That you should turn to him shows some mean strain of blood in you! It is like to like, with your hybrid American origins! Eleanora talks much of your Irish ancestry—your proud, Celtic ancestry! Pah! she is a simpleton! It is, I could swear it, from paltry peasant rebels you descend, driven from their land by the noble race that dominates and rules them! No!" he sobbed, as he met the chill scrutiny of her gaze and saw its cutting glint of irony, "you are not the aristocrat I believed you to be!"

He leaned, then, panting on the table, pushing the books aside with a shaking hand, expecting, it was evident, passionate denial and protest from her. But for a long time Persis was silent, her eyes downcast, her fingers playing automatically with the pen she had taken up; and the depth and finality of their alienation was borne in upon the desperate and wretched man before her by the stillness of this deliberating pause. If she felt humiliation—was this not what it said?—it was because of her friendship

with him, because of her intimacy with a man who could stoop to such smirching littlenesses.

She said at last, not raising her eyes to him: "The mark of the aristocrat, you always said, was fearlessness. Is n't it true that you fear the weak and lowly because you feel their defects in yourself? Is n't it true that you turn to Conrad for the same reason that I do, because he is strong where we are weak?"

"False! False!" Wehlitz wailed, frantically darting from his chair. "It is a lie: and your tongue is a serpent's tongue! I am a plebeian and a weakling, then! And it is Conrad's strength to care for me! I understand what she hisses—the smiling snake! I understand her vengeance! Yet I could tell you tales of Conrad! No! no!—I do not stoop! It is his homage—his service that I have accepted—the tribute of the low to the high! I have suffered him!—I suffer him no longer! My hat! Where is my hat?" He looked around with a wild dazed look.

Persis rose and gave it to him. She felt, as she looked into his ravaged and distorted face, a blow of pity. "You are not strong enough to strike your friends from you," she said. "You are beside yourself with rancour."

He gave a strange, high laugh. "Beside myself! Mad! Yes!—I am mad!—And you have driven me so!" And casting a malignant glance upon her he darted from the room.

CHAPTER XXX

ALL that day Persis waited. She could not have said what she was waiting for. Everything was over and she did not know whether it was she who had destroyed beauty, who shattered a treasure that lay within her hand or whether—the horrid. ironic intuition came again and again, making her sick—there had never been any beauty and never any treasure, whether it had all been a mistake not even tragic. Until she had seen Conrad again, and had confessed to him and had received his condemnation or absolution she felt that the chapter was not closed. But he did not come. Nor did Eleanora. The whole day passed and no one came to the Pension Müller. Persis had said nothing to her mother, but that evening, when they went up to dress for dinner, she asked her if she was not ready to leave Tannenkreuz. "I should like to start for Paris, directly, mamma, if you do not mind."

Mrs. Fennamy said at once that she was quite ready to go and that Mrs. Bartlett's flat was waiting for them, as Persis knew. They could leave next day, or the day after. There was only the packing to be done. Persis began her packing that evening

after dinner and by bed-time one large box stood ready and there was only the small one to finish.

She woke next morning feeling sure that a letter must come to her from Conrad. But the post brought only a long, silly screed from an Italian girl whom she had met the year before in Rome and whose youthful dreams of independence and emancipation she had encouraged.

She lay on, looking dully out at her room with its scattered effects, thinking that she would again have her breakfast in bed so that she need not face her mother over the shared and intimate tray. She had decided upon this when she heard the sound of weeping in her mother's room. A moment's attention revealed the grief as Eleanora's. Persis lay listening with a faint, stiff smile. Poor Eleanora's plaints always made her think of the muffled neighing of a horse and she could picture her walking up and down and pouring them out, while she clutched at her bodice with both hands. After a little while they ceased and she heard Eleanora go away. Shortly after this her mother, wrapped in her dressing-gown, came into her room. "I just came to tell you about Eleanora," Mrs. Fennamy remarked, standing at the foot of the bed and looking round the room rather than at Persis. "She wanted to come in to you, but I said I guessed you were worn out over the whole thing and that she 'd better go away just now. She says perhaps she 'll come to Paris with us."

"What is the matter with her?" Persis inquired.

"She has told you, I suppose, that Ludwig asked me to marry him, yesterday, and that I refused him."

"Yes; she told me. And she 's had an awful night with him. Poor fellow," Mrs. Fennamy added, surprising her daughter.

"And you blame me, too, and think me a monster of hard-heartedness?" Persis remarked, turning on her pillow. But Mrs. Fennamy, with evident sincerity, replied, "Why no, I don't, Persis. I don't see that you are to be blamed any more than he is."

"Well, what is he going to do?" Persis asked after a moment. "Is he gone away already? And is Herr Sachs gone with him?"

"No, not yet. But he 's going. And that 's what makes Eleanora so miserable. It 's parted him and Herr Sachs. He won't see Herr Sachs. He says he 'll never see him again. And he won't let any one come with him or tell Eleanora, even, where he is going."

"He won't see Herr Sachs?"

"He sent down word to him twice last night that he would n't see him. Herr Sachs is dreadfully upset, of course."

Persis lay reflecting. Suddenly she sat up and threw the clothes aside and put her feet to the floor.

"Well, Persis?" Mrs. Fennamy inquired, eyeing her. "Are n't you going to have your breakfast in bed?"

"No. I shall get up. I must see him."

"See him? Herr Wehlitz?"

"No. Herr Sachs."

She had pressed her finger to the bell.

"I would n't do that if I were you, Persis," said Mrs. Fennamy after a moment. "If Herr Wehlitz hears about it it will make him feel worse than ever about Herr Sachs, and what one hopes is that he 'll make it up with him after a little while."

"I cannot help what Ludwig hears or thinks. I must see Conrad."

The maid had come. Persis ordered her bath and her breakfast.

Mrs. Fennamy looked at her for a few moments longer and then went away into her room. Half an hour later she heard Persis go downstairs.

After the day and night of heavy wind and rain, it was a high, chill, boisterous and sunny day. The air was full of fluttering golden leaves and the streets of the little town seemed freshly set out for some charming drama. A woman at a corner was selling roses from a large basket. "Good luck go with you, Fräulein," she said as Persis passed and her maternal smile was so winning that, moved by a half superstitious impulse, Persis stopped and bought a bunch of the crisp, red flowers. Her mind, as she hurried on, holding them to her face, was filled with dissolving pictures. Ludwig had failed her, and he had failed Conrad. He had cast them both aside, and if in much the fault was hers in this it was not so; and

Conrad was faultless. Conrad would forgive her if she had been cruel, and he would come with them. They would study together. She saw a table piled with books over which they bent, snowy Paris outside. He would teach her. He would understand and sustain her. Yet under the vision which the fragrance of the roses seemed to evoke lay a heaviness of heart that felt like guilt.

Sachs had gone out. She reflected, standing at the door, and then said to the landlady that she would go up and leave a note for him. In his room she looked about her with her intent, impersonal gaze; a poor, bleak, student's room, a badly made bed in one corner, a chest of drawers with a cracked mirror upon it in another, a stove and a flimsy table piled with books and papers. The outer garments of Sachs's scant wardrobe hung against the door.

Persis found a piece of note paper and, leaning over the table, wrote: "I beg of you to come at once. I must see you." She folded the paper and laid the bunch of roses upon it. Then she went back to the pension.

She could not now go on with her packing. She told her mother that she expected Herr Sachs and that they would leave next day. The morning passed in a tension of eagerness so great she felt it as a torpor, a strange drowsiness, like the mist made by a dragon-fly's wings, beating with inconceivable rapidity. Her heart seemed to drowze and droop and ache with anxiety.

Sachs's answer did not come till after luncheon and it was brought to her in the garden where she was sitting with her mother over coffee in a nook of bright sunlight. Her fingers shook as she opened it. "*Gnädiges Fräulein,*" it ran, "I can not come. I am in great trouble and I am leaving Tannenkreuz. I thank you from my heart for all your kindness to me."

Over the letter Persis gazed, meeting her mother's eyes. She had become very pale.

"Is anything the matter?" Mrs. Fennamy asked presently.

Persis rose and stood looking before her into the garden. She did not seem to hear the question, but after a moment she laughed and said: "No, nothing is the matter. I shall not see Herr Sachs again, either, that is all." After another moment she added. "I must finish my packing."

She went up the steps into the salon and passed their sitting-room, its door ajar, so that she could see the sofa where she had sat with Conrad; the books upon the table. She had forgotten the books; they must be packed. She went in to gather them up, but they slid from her arms. No; there were too many of them; and she would not now go on with her packing. Strange little stage, where so much had happened!—and all was over now, the actors vanished like wraiths. She stood looking about it for a moment longer and then went upstairs.

In her own room, she went to the window and

looked out. She could see her mother sitting below there on the warm flags near the house. She had ceased to drink her coffee and was sitting still, gazing before her. She was anxious, no doubt, and yet how little she could guess at what was worse than sorrow in this closing scene of the autumn at Tannenkreuz. The Lombardy poplars were shaking through all their height as if with an angry menace. They made her think of a cemetery she had seen in Italy, a hideous place, decked out in bead wreathes. "That is where it all ends," she thought; "in the bead wreathes." She turned from the window and sank down on a little chair placed against the wall and her eyes now fixed themselves on an old-fashioned print framed in a rustic frame that hung over the bed. It represented a German *Mädchen,* with hair dressed in a chignon and the ruffled, tightly fitting bodice of the 'seventies, leaning from a rose-wreathed window to kiss a moustached youth. Persis felt that she had not really seen this picture before. She examined it carefully, her head leaning back against the wall, her hands lying, palm upward, in her lap. The girl was a girl of her own age, but very portly; she wore a necklace and a bracelet and a rose behind her ear, and her eyelashes and her bust were romantically emphasized. Lovers; they were lovers; and what would such a couple be like to-day, such a romantic German couple? She saw them; a stout matron with heavy chin and hard appraising eye; a paunched, glazed citizen; she saw their home, its hideous comforts; she saw the brood of

children. And all to end in the bead-wreaths. Her eyes dropped then to Sachs's note, lying in her lap. He left her. She was alone in this world, hateful and ridiculous. He, too, like Ludwig, like herself, was hateful and ridiculous.

The nightmares of the last weeks, those nightmares that he had dispelled, surged up over her, no longer definite but only the more horrible for their suffocating formlessness, thick, black, wave upon wave, cloud upon cloud, all Ludwig's eternity of dread, immense black clouds of horror like tidal waves, towering and shutting out the sky. She was alone and her barrier against the wilderness was gone. A vast emptiness seemed to engulf her.

There was a knock at the door. She heard it as if from far away. The maid, in answer to her muttered assent, came in and told her that Graf von Lüdenstein was below and had asked to see her. Persis looked at the girl for a moment. Her mind seemed to swing in the void. She said that she would see the Herr Graf.

When the girl had gone she rose and stood still in the middle of the room. Her body felt curiously light, as though the dark agony had condensed in vapour and bore her up. It was relief, a wild relief that mounted in her and was it not almost joy? She sped downstairs and felt that she was outracing something. She entered the little sitting-room almost with the impetus of a long-imprisoned gaiety released. Lüdenstein's face showed its surprise.

"I am glad to see you!" she exclaimed. "I have spent such a morning of boredom." She hardly knew what the words were that came to her lips.

Lüdenstein examined her. "You and Ludwig have parted, I hear," he said, and he spoke gravely.

She crossed the room and sank down on the sofa, and looking up at him, smiling, she nodded and said: "Yes, we have parted."

Stroking his beard, he stood before her, silent.

"Have you seen him?" she asked.

"No; his door is closed to me. He will not see me," said Lüdenstein. "Ah. So you have sent him away. Poor Ludwig; he will be suffering."

"I have not sent him away," said Persis laughing. "He has gone. It is always Ludwig's sufferings that you all think of. No one can give a thought to mine."

"But you are not suffering," said Lüdenstein, still with his gravity. "No, no; a marble nymph cannot suffer, not even when unfortunate men of flesh and blood dash themselves to pieces against her."

"Can she not?" she answered, faintly smiling.

He drew nearer, leaning against the table with folded arms, looking down at her, and it was in a changed voice that he said presently, "Are you suffering, Fräulein Persis?"

For a moment she did not reply. The sting of tears mounted to her eyes. How little he understood her. Only Conrad understood, and he had left her. "I am bored," she said, speaking in the childish, sullen

voice, her eyes downcast so that he should not see the tears.

Again there was a little silence. Lüdenstein stood above her, looking at her, and she continued to stare down at the carpet.

"*Aux grands maux grands remèdes,*" he said at last. "We must find some remedy for your boredom, Fräulein."

"It will be difficult to find."

"You seek it?"

"We are leaving Tannenkreuz to-morrow for Paris," she replied. "Had you not heard?"

"Ah. You are going to Paris? No; I had not heard." He stroked his beard. "I, too, then, shall leave Tannenkreuz. But why not sooner? Why not to-night, indeed? And why to Paris?"

She had the impression, horrible, yet delicious, of his strength, his strange, alien strength, that could pause and take its measures and make its implications and risk nothing through importunity. He might be saying everything; he might be saying nothing; but the apple hung there and she was the Eve again, the Eve, guilty already in her delay beside the tree. In a darkened and gorgeous world, she laid her hand upon the apple.

"Why indeed?" She had now lifted her eyes to his and she dimly and ironically smiled. "Had you intended to follow us?"

"Yes. I had intended to follow you," said Lüdenstein; "when you went. But do not let it be Paris.

Paris is not a place for great remedies—a vulgar, flaunting town. Why not wide, far travel? Egypt? Egypt and the Nile? You have never been to Egypt?"

"I think of the Nile as the symbol of monotony. It would be as bad as Tannenkreuz."

"Sicily, then?" said Lüdenstein. "A ride through Sicily. You ride?"

"Yes. I am fond of riding."

"And you have not seen Sicily?"

"No. We have never yet gone to Sicily. I do not like discomfort of any sort. It is a difficult country to travel in with comfort I have heard, once one has left the beaten track."

"That depends on how one travels. With escorts, servants, money freely spent, one can find comfort in very nearly every country. Sicily; yes; one could go south to Italy to-night and be in Sicily within two days."

She sat silent. She had, in the silence, a sensation of speed, of flight, as though, though they were so still, she were an Europa borne away among the waters. Horror and delight rang through her. The horror was not of him. Curiously, she felt no touch of fear of him; they were equals; she, a woman, choosing her fate. She said at last. "I must think."

"But not alone, then," said Lüdenstein. He betrayed no quiver of triumph. He did not stir. "You will think with me; and not here."

"Where then?" They spoke in lowered voices; it was the only symptom of their state.

"It is a fine afternoon. Let us go up to the woods where we may deliberate with no fear of interruption." He added, "From the woods the way is shortest to the station—and one would be unobserved. The train does not go till 5.15."

She sat on for a moment longer, looking now not at him but about the room. Then she rose and stood before him. He took off his glasses and she found herself gazing into his strangely bared eyes. She did not fear him. She smiled at him, with still the touch of irony, as though she mocked him and herself. "Let us go to the woods," she said.

"Brave—beautiful;" Lüdenstein murmured. He seemed nearer to her than if he had taken her in his arms.

She smiled on; "You do not know what I am. We are going to deliberate. We are going to think."

"We are going to think," said Lüdenstein. "Paris, boredom; or the magic carpet, spread at your feet. Once you step upon it you will only need to wish and the wish will be accomplished." He looked at her, his eyes still bared, and said: "I love you."

She turned from him then, murmuring that she must get her hat and cloak. Fear had crossed her; but, swiftly mounting to her room she beat it back and told herself that now, in her own life, she was to enact Ludwig's doctrine of freedom and peril and

scorn of the world's standards; the gulfs of loneliness were behind her and great ranges of wild beauty stood against the sky.

As she left her room, her hat tied under her chin, her cloak wrapped round her, her mother came up the stairs.

A singular hardness turned Persis to smiling, inscrutable stone. She stood still, gazing at her mother and knowing in herself powers of dissimulation till then inconceivable. If she hesitated, if she wavered, she was lost. She stood there on her precipice path, knit to the one resolve; a glance, a thought aside, and she would be dashed down, to what depths of helplessness, shame and abasement! She saw the vision in a flash—it made her giddy;—she might cast herself weeping on her mother's breast.

"I am going for a little walk with Graf von Lüdenstein," she said. She heard the word "little" reverberate. A false step. She stiffened her lips to a firmer smile.

It was, apparently, with mere mildness that her mother looked at her. "Are you going to the woods? They 'll be pretty wet, I expect," she remarked.

"After all this sun and wind? Oh, no; it will be delicious there." Delicious, too, was strangely artificial. She felt as if she were speaking through the marble lips of some sinister mask.

Mrs. Fennamy now glanced down over the bannisters into the well of the staircase.

"I should think you 'd better stay and do your

packing," she remarked. "You 'll get all tired out walking around the woods."

"I can pack after dinner."

"Oh, are you going to stay out till dinner-time?"

This, in her mother, was an unaccustomed persistence and Persis felt a shield in the touch of irritation it caused her. "I may stay out till then," she said.

Her mother continued to look over the bannisters, rather as if she expected to see Graf von Lüdenstein at the foot of the stairs, and now, yet more uncharacteristically, she went on: "I should think you 'd rather stay in and have him play to you. His playing is the best thing about him."

"The best thing about him is that he amuses me," said Persis. "And I am very much in need of amusement to-day." She went by her mother and began to go down the stairs. She had gone half down the first flight when she heard her mother's voice again. "Persis," it said.

She looked up. The placid little wax-doll face was still bent over the staircase and, dimly fair against the shadowed ceiling that was its background, it looked down at her.

Persis paused. "It 's sure to be wet in the woods," said Mrs. Fennamy, "and if you 're going to be wandering around till dinner-time you 'll catch cold. Wait a moment. I 'll get your rubbers for you."

Helplessly, and ready to break into sobs of desperation, Persis waited until she reappeared carrying the galoshes. She took them from her without speak-

ing. She was trembling and she feared now that her mother must surely read some strangeness in her demeanour. But, as if satisfied that all was well, Mrs. Fennamy remounted the stairs and went into her own room.

CHAPTER XXXI

HALF-AN-HOUR later Sachs, piling his books and clothes into a flat, battered little box, heard the jingle and cracking of one of the Tannenkreuz carriages outside his rooms and, as he looked out, his eyes, to his infinite astonishment, met those of Mrs. Fennamy lifted to him from below. Mrs. Fennamy, her black lace bonnet tied beneath her chin, her black lace parasol in her hand, looked the picture of composure; yet the young man knew at once that her appearance here was abnormal. "Can I speak to you for a moment?" she said.

Sachs was in his shirt-sleeves. He hastily dragged on his coat, took his hat and went down to her.

"I want you to come for a drive with me, Herr Sachs," said Mrs. Fennamy, looking at him with some intentness. "I expect you're very busy, but I've a special reason for interrupting you. It's about Persis. I can tell you while we drive."

"About Fräulein Persis, *gnädige Frau,*" Sachs faltered, looking at her with anxiety. "Can you tell me here, then, perhaps? I am in the midst of my packing; I expect to leave Tannenkreuz to-night or—it depends on Ludwig—to-morrow. I have not seen

him and when I have packed I must go in search of him. He is not at his hotel."

"We 're all in the midst of packing, Herr Sachs," said Mrs. Fennamy; "and we 're all leaving Tannenkreuz to-night or to-morrow. But you 're fond of Persis, are n't you? you 'd be sorry if anything was to happen to her?"

"Fond? Of Fräulein Persis? Yes; yes; very fond indeed. It has grieved me to think that the time for parting has come——" Sachs spoke confusedly.

"It has come, I guess; you need n't worry over that," said Mrs. Fennamy, with a dim smile not unlike her daughter's; "if that is what worries you. I know you 've said good-bye and that you feel it 's better not to see her again; and I think you 're right." She went on in an unchanged voice: "I 've an idea that Persis is going to run away with Graf von Lüdenstein this evening, and I thought perhaps you could help me to prevent it."

Sachs and she now looked at each other very intently indeed, and, for some moments, without speaking. "You see," Mrs. Fennamy went on, "you would n't come to see her, so I suppose she felt desperate."

Sachs had grown very pale, but he did not speak, either in protest or consolation. He stepped into the carriage, and, Mrs. Fennamy, ordering the boy to drive up to the pine-woods, they clattered down the street.

"Persis has been very much upset over this affair

with Herr Wehlitz," Mrs. Fennamy continued; "more upset than she knows; and she's very young, and I expect she feels that everything is over. From the way she looked this afternoon when she said she was going to have a walk in the woods with Graf von Lüdenstein, I felt sure that she did n't intend to come back. Well, I know you are a good man, Herr Sachs, and like to help people, so I thought you'd help me. Persis cares for your opinion. You're the only person I know who has any influence over her."

Sachs sat, a hand on each knee, his face set and curiously divested of all its comicality. "Do you not think that you, perhaps, imagine this, *gnädige Frau?*" he said. "Fräulein Persis is not in love with Graf von Lüdenstein."

"I know she is n't. But he's in love with her. And she's desperate. When young people get desperate they can do dreadful things, Herr Sachs. I'm not standing up for Persis. I expect she's pretty bad. But I know the way she feels. She feels that everybody is giving her up and that she may as well give herself up. She just wants to try wickedness."

"Yes, yes," Sachs assented, nodding. "I understand that, *gnädige Frau,* I understand that. Do not think that I am condemning the unhappy young Fräulein. No; and I have been to blame. I should not have refused to see her again. I was thinking of Ludwig. I am troubled about him, *gnädige Frau;*

very much troubled. If the Fräulein is unhappy, he is indeed far more so."

They had by now left the town and were on the broad road that led to the pine-woods. Neither Mrs. Fennamy nor Sachs spoke for a little while. The young man sat motionless, his eyes fixed before him; Mrs. Fennamy could hear him repeatedly swallowing, as if with effort, and, glancing at him, she saw that his lips twitched and trembled with the effort to repress tears.

"And what is your plan, *gnädige Frau?*" he asked at last in a gentle voice.

Mrs. Fennamy also spoke with a certain effort, but her plans were evidently all in readiness. "You know there are three ways out of the woods," she said; "I saw them go up one through the vineyards. The other leads straight on to the station and the third comes out on to this road. I thought when we got up to the pines you could take the path that leads from here across the fields into the lower woods, and I 'd wait for you, and if you did n't come back I 'd know you 'd found her and were taking her home by the vineyard path. It would be very humiliating for her, would n't it, if I were to spring out upon them and separate them? But you might have been up there for a walk, thinking things over; it might look quite natural."

Sachs listened attentively and nodded. "I could have gone up to look for Ludwig. I had indeed thought of looking for him in the woods."

"You may find them all up there together," Mrs. Fennamy suggested. "I hope no one will be violent."

"And if I do not find them, *gnädige Frau?*" Sachs inquired.

"They'd be on the path to the station then," said Mrs. Fennamy, "and we'd drive straight off to the station. There are lots of trains they might take; it would depend upon where he was taking her. But we might get there in time. He won't bring her down this road, I'm sure. But if he does they'll meet me."

She spoke composedly, if with a slight steadying of her tones. Sachs's face suddenly contracted. He looked as if he were going to cry. "And then, *gnädige Frau?*" he inquired in a trembling voice. "And then? Should we follow them? Could you go alone? My difficulty is that there is also Ludwig to be thought of. I fear for Ludwig; I greatly fear for him. How am I to leave him?"

"You mean you're afraid he'll commit suicide?" Mrs. Fennamy asked.

"Yes, that—and more. I fear for his mind," Sachs spoke in a low voice, touching his forehead with his forefinger. "He has had too much to bear."

"I see," said Mrs. Fennamy after a moment. "Well, you can come to the station with me if you don't find them. And if they're gone I'll follow them alone." And after a moment's pause, she asked suddenly: "He's not a cruel man, is he?"

Sachs's face still quivered. "Lüdenstein, *gnädige* Frau? He can be kind. And she has power over him."

"Is he very bad?"

Sachs for a moment was silent, and the mother's little face, turned to him, showed a slight greyness, a pinching of the lips, as though some crumbling frost had aged it. "He is a man with taste, *gnädige* Frau," Sachs replied at last, bending down his eyes. "And she has power. He may shatter her, but he will not corrupt her."

Now they drove on in silence. They had reached the pine-woods, the steep escarpment of the bank on one hand, and on the other the fall to the lower woods. Gusts of strong fragrance were blown upon them. The narrow slip of sky above was tossed with hurrying white upon deep blue. Mrs. Fennamy suddenly motioned to the boy, and he drew up beside a little path that ran into the pines. "Here," she said. "It leads out over the fields and brings you to the beeches."

Sachs got out.

"I 'll wait for you," said Mrs. Fennamy. "Don't let her know that I suspected her if you find her." She leaned from the side of the carriage to press his hand. The young man grasped it tightly, and they looked into each other's eyes.

CHAPTER XXXII

SACHS limped swiftly through the pine-woods and out into the fields where the clouds cast long, speeding shadows. He recognized, lying beyond the fields, the contour of the beech-woods. Ludwig had brought him once to his beloved spot, the little clearing, with its bank and high trees, and in ten minutes he reached the path that led there. Bushes here grew thickly, and he went more slowly, not certain of his way; but he saw, presently, the open, sunny space glimmering before him, and then he heard the sound of voices. A few steps further, and he saw them.

They stood in the dappled shade of the tall trees, and she was in his arms. Not reluctant; no; that was evident, as, steadying himself on his crutch for a moment, Sachs stood still to look. Not reluctant, yet, in the rigidity of her figure, her arms straightly falling at her sides, her head pressed by his hand, not bent, against his shoulder, there was determination rather than yielding. Lüdenstein was speaking in low, passionate tones.

Sachs put aside the last bushes and came forward.

When he looked at them again they had parted, and stood staring at him. Lüdenstein was flushed. The

face of Persis seemed in its pallor like a still, uncanny light. After his glance at it, Sachs turned his eyes away.

Lüdenstein was the first to recover himself. "Well, Herr Sachs, and what do you do here?" he asked. His flushed forehead and narrowed eyes showed his anger, but he spoke in a tone of contemptuous displeasure rather than with any menace or violence.

"I came to look for Ludwig," said Sachs. "I have been looking for him."

"Ah. So. Indeed." Lüdenstein was evidently taken aback. He glanced sharply at Persis, with a curious transformation of his usual sleepy gaze. "He is not here, you see."

"No, I see that he is not."

"That being the case," Lüdenstein continued, "you will perhaps be kind enough to continue your researches further afield and leave Fräulein Fennamy and me to our conversation."

There was a slight pause. Sacks stood looking down and screwing the point of his crutch into the soft carpet of fallen leaves.

"No," he then said; "since you have not seen him, it is not probable that he is in the woods. I shall return to Tannenkreuz." At last he raised his eyes to Persis. "Will you come with me, Fräulein Fennamy?"

While they spoke Persis had not stirred. Her chest sunken, her arms falling straightly, her head bent forward, she kept her gaze fixed, in its strange bright-

ness, upon Sachs. When he looked at her now and spoke to her, she started slightly, and her lips parted, but no sound issued from them.

"Will you come back with me to Tannenkreuz, Fräulein?" Sachs repeated.

"Why should I come back with you?" she asked, speaking with difficulty.

"I do not know why, Fräulein. I only hope you will."

Keeping her eyes on the young man, she pointed her hand at Lüdenstein. "I was going away with him. I had just told him that I would go with him. We were going to Sicily—we were going all over the world —wherever I choose. He loves me."

"And do you love him, Fräulein?" Sachs asked, while Lüdenstein stood, his arms folded, frowning and looking on the ground.

"No," said Persis, shaking her head. "I don't love him. But I don't love anybody. I have found out about myself. I am not different. I am like all the other people; like all the people in Ludwig's morass. The things I thought were real are not real. I am not real. So why should I mind about love? What I want is to be amused." The words fell softly, evenly, like flakes of scorched and brittle paper falling through the air.

"I think that if you do not love him, Fräulein, you would do well to return with me," said Sachs. "You would not be amused. You would be very unhappy; very unhappy indeed."

"I could hardly be more unhappy than I am now. And I should not be alone."

"Yes; you would be alone, Fräulein. And you might be even more unhappy than you are now."

"May I have my voice in this dialogue?" Lüdenstein now interposed. "I think that it concerns me, as well as Fräulein Fennamy. She does not love me, as she tells you; but why, Herr Sachs, should she not come to love me? Why may she not cease to be unhappy? By what right do you pronounce against the future? I say to you—and to her—that she will love me; and I say that all the happiness possible to us in life shall be hers. Freedom, and power, and beauty; I can give them all, and love." His eyes were on Persis. There was power and dignity in his demeanour. Bowing his head, Sachs stood silent.

They heard the rustling of the trees around them. Then Persis said: "Well, what do you answer for me to that, Herr Sachs? Is it true, do you think? Shall I go with him and see if it is true? At least he loves me, and no one else does that."

Sachs stood silent, moving his crutch among the leaves.

"Is it true, do you think?" she repeated. Her eyes sought his, and suddenly she saw that he could not raise them.

"It may be true, Fräulein," he said. "I cannot say. But I hope that you will not go with him." And as she stood silent, looking at him, he said: "Your mother loves you; and you will leave her for-

saken. And I, too, love you, Fräulein, though I can give you nothing."

"Ah!" was breathed—a deep note—from Lüdenstein. "This is what I expected!" He drew his shoulders together in a gesture of repudiating exasperation. "This is what I was waiting for! Soul versus body! The saint versus the sinner! The same old comedy—and a piteous one—of lovely, foolish Thais and the desert monk—with the same ending. Do you know how it ends, that old story, Fräulein Persis? Do you know what is the fate of the poor little Thais who follows the desert monk? They wall her up; they wall her up in her youth and beauty in a narrow cell, and leave her there to wither until such time as the angels come to find the little dried skeleton and take it up to their heaven. Are you to be caught by such flimsy snares as these—you, the proud young thinker? No, no; listen to me now—the sinner, if you will, after the saint." He strode to her side as he spoke and seized her by the hands, making her look at him. "Look with me at facts, Fräulein Persis," he said. "You are here, young and lovely, and it is I who find you so. You have bewitched me. But look at facts. How many women find the man whom they can bewitch? How many men will be willing to give their lives to you, Fräulein Persis? Will you know the great love, the great rapture of romantic love? Come; think clearly. Is it likely? Have you ever found it yet? No. It is one woman in a million who finds it—or who for a little while

believes she has. And for a woman what else is there in life but love? Ask yourself. What else have you sought, here in Tannenkreuz? What else have you desired? And why are you so unhappy except that it has failed you? Ludwig was not the romantic lover who would carry you away; far from it. And Herr Sachs, as he truly says, in answer to your reproach, has nothing to offer, not even love. Now look at the future. You are not rich; you have no worldly power; a brilliant match is not likely. See yourself with madame your mother, in the little Paris flat, in the hotel here and there, going to lectures, giving tea-parties, engaging, perhaps, in works of benevolence, wandering, seeking, unsatisfied, until one day you will wake up, and there, in her cell, will stand an old and shrivelled Thais, who has never known life; a poor little American old maid with her very old little mother, hopping still from bough to bough of the European tree—have we not seen them often? And now, look —I love you, with passion—as you know; but you do not yet know what such a love can be. And I offer you all the splendour and joy of life; the world of art, of men, will be open to you, and you will be a queen in it—for I am not one to wish to hide my treasure; I wish to share life with her. And what if it is all to end one day? Is not that what you will say to me? What if it is all to end in the shrivelled skeleton? I do not deceive you with false pictures, my lovely child. It will all end; yet not in a cell. No; I see you, proud and smiling, a figure of European renown, still choos-

ing your own path, still the friend of men, still ripe with the ripeness of deep experience. The end is not so bad, though all ends are bad, and we must not deny it. Come now with me. Be brave. Send him away and take me and life and our life together."

While he spoke, holding her by the hands, Persis had stood looking into his face with wide, drinking eyes as though there went through her a distillation, fine, shuddering in potency, of all that experience of which he spoke. It was as though in her look she took it all, to the last drop of realization. But as he ended, drawing her hands to his breast and speaking almost with tenderness in his urgency, she moved back from him, and, as he followed, still holding her, she shook her head slowly, still looking into his eyes.

"No, I cannot, I cannot," she said. "I see it all. It is true. But I see more than you do. I would rather be the little shrivelled old maid. Though I should not be like that. I have known the other, and rejected it. It is all as terrible as you say; but it would be more terrible to go with you. It would be the worst unhappiness. He is right. I should grow to hate you. Don't you feel it yourself? There is nothing, nothing between us but things that would make us hate each other. And I do not hate you now; I only hate myself."

"I could bear with your hatred," said Lüdenstein, looking at her with a singular look.

She covered her face with her hands. "I know you could. That would be the worst horror of all."

"It is this wretched little man," said Lüdenstein. He turned his eyes on Sachs, and his ample, golden face expressed a still, almost a contemplative violence. "This wretched little maggot, of the breed well-named by Ludwig. Gladly would I wring his neck, if that would serve me." He brought his eyes back to her. "And you will not come with me? It is true, then, that I have lost you—and through him?"

"It is true. I am going back with him."

"Wait." He caught her arm. "Look at me," he said. "I love you. Ah! the icy eyes. What is it that you are made of—inscrutable girl? Is it ice—or marble—or only paper?—only flimsy paper that wavers and turns with every gust of wind—paper that any hand may tear? Do not heed my rudeness. You have given me a blow. For I love you—paper sorceress though you are—and what better destiny would you have asked for than to be burned at my fire? So. It is true, then. You come to my arms. You give yourself to my kisses. You promise yourself to me. And then, when this priestling comes, you turn away, crisp, empty, rustling. Ah! you are right when you say that you will not be as the others. You have come too near the flame. You may reject it, but you are scorched by it. Never again will you forget it."

While he spoke, his bitter half-smile probing her, a deathly pallor crossed her face. She closed her eyes. "Let me go," she muttered, like a little girl in deadly fear. "You terrify me."

He relaxed his hold on her arm and stepped back. "I will let you go. What else can I do? I do not wish to frighten you. Go with your priestling. He will restore you." He doffed his hat before her with ceremony.

Sachs had limped forward, and Persis seized his arm. "Take me back," she said. "It will be too late for tea. Mamma will be wondering——"

They left Lüdenstein standing in the clearing, looking after them, and in a moment the woods had closed about them, and he was out of sight.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"IT is quieter here, and we shall be less likely to meet anyone," said Sachs presently, turning into the lower belt of pine-woods.

Stillness fell thickly about them as they entered the tall aisles. The ground, sloping downwards, was slippery with its carpeting of needles; the sun laid long beams among the rosy boles. Far above, in the green roof, a wind moaned softly.

Persis walked steadily forward, her hand clutched on Sachs's arm; but suddenly she stopped and fixed her eyes upon him. The rigor left her face; her chin began to tremble; the tears rose; she trembled violently all over. "It is true. What he said is true. Paper; I am like that;—horrible;—empty. Wait. I must tell you. That was why I came with him. The world was like a paper world, and it frightened me so dreadfully that when he came I was glad. Oh—I cannot explain. You despise me—as he does. Yes! I am an abandoned woman! It was the same with me as with an abandoned woman."

"But I do not despise abandoned women, Fräulein," said Sachs gently.

At this Persis felt the trembling cease. A rigidity cramped her throat and a hot flush scorched her eye-

balls. She walked on before him, in silence, down the dim aisles.

"Fräulein," said Sachs's voice, almost timidly, behind her. She paused for him to join her, not looking at him. "I have hurt you. I am stupid. You must forgive me."

"No," said Persis in a low, harsh voice, "I am not hurt. I deserve it. I am not offended." She repeated in a lower voice: "I am an abandoned woman."

"No, Fräulein, not that," said Sachs, casting anxious glances round at her as, with some difficulty, he kept pace with her. "Not that. You are not an abandoned woman, though you were a woman in great danger. For though Lüdenstein is not an ignoble man, he is a man who is without love; he does not know the meaning of the word love, and to have gone with him—what would it have led to in your life? I do not speak from the conventional point of view."

"I knew it—I knew it all," she said. "And I chose it, open-eyed. What is that if it is not abandoned? How can you not despise me?"

"But, Fräulein, I love you—as I said. You are more dear to me than I can say. How can you think that I despise you?"

She was weeping, her hands before her face, and she wept so helplessly that Sachs presently, putting his hand on her arm, begged her to stop and rest. She sank down on the pine-needles, and, leaning on his crutch, he stood looking at her.

"You love me because you are good," she sobbed when she could find her voice. "You do not understand. He understands me better. How could anyone like you understand such vanity, such recklessness, such hardness of heart?"

"But I am not good, Fräulein. I understand."

"No—no; you cannot. Your love hurts me because I know that you cannot. And how could I make you? I was not misled. It was not romance and folly. I chose evil, yes, I chose evil, knowing that it was evil. Not like him. He is innocent, nothing to him is evil. But I felt it and chose it; you must see the truth. I came up to the wood with him hoping that he would make love to me—make passionate love to me—so that I should forget myself, and love myself, through his love. And though, when he kissed me and held me in his arms, I knew that I did not love him, it was a joy, a wild joy, to feel his love. I was ready to go away with him. I was ready for everything."

He stood looking down at her and the anxiety of his look had intensified to suffering. Presently he sat down on the ground, laying his crutch beside him.

"Fräulein," he said, "would it give you more confidence in my understanding, would it make you feel less alone, if I told you how much a sinner I have been, not only in intention, but in act. You speak of abandoned women and you do not know of what you speak. But at one time in my youth, and it is not many years ago—I was an abandoned man. Yes, yes

indeed, Fräulein, I was a sinner, knowing that I sinned, and my dissipations would have been only sordid had not sentimentality, innate and racial, lent them always some touch of illusion. So. Now you will not tell me that I do not understand." She had raised her head and turned her eyes on him and he smiled slightly at her. "And you will not think that I despise you. I do not despise myself; not now; not since I have turned my back on evil. You have turned your back on it, Fräulein."

There was silence now for a long time. Persis looked down the narrow distances, her breaths coming more quietly until at last her chest rose and fell in an even cadence. She looked around her as though she saw the world again, and, her eyes dropping to the pine-needles, she put her hand down among them and let them pass softly through her fingers.

"Do you think it is true, what he said," she asked suddenly, "that no one will ever love me again and that I shall never marry?"

Sachs looked at her with a faint touch of his merry grimace. "It seems to me improbable, Fräulein. He put it cleverly, but I thought it, at the time, very improbable. If you do not marry, I do not think that it will be because no one will again love you."

"Tell me," she went on, after another moment, raising her eyes to his for a grave glance; "when you say that you love me, do you mean only heavenly love, such as Graf von Lüdenstein spoke of, or human love? I mean, if you had all that he says he has to offer,

would you care to marry me, to have me for your wife?" And again she raised her eyes to him, while the pine-needles, with a soft monotonousness, ran through her fingers.

Sachs returned her gaze. "Very much indeed, Fräulein," he then answered. "Though," he added, "I should not agree to Graf von Lüdenstein's division between the heavenly and human loves. Unless it is heavenly, I do not call it love."

"No. I see. Of course not," said Persis.

She sat again silent, watching the pine-needles. Her downcast face, all its baleful radiance gone, was as sodden, as ingenuous as a child's that had exhausted itself with crying. Again, suddenly, not raising her eyes, she said: "Will you marry me? Will you let me be with you always?"

"Ah, Fräulein!" said Sachs, after a silence; "You do not know what you are saying," he then went on. His tone, amazed and tender, rallied her. "You are tired and have begun to dream. We must now return to Madame Fennamy. As you said, she will be wondering what has become of you."

"She will not wonder. No, I mean what I say and I know quite well what I say. There is no one like you. I only feel safe when I am with you, and happy and at peace. If you are so poor, I have enough money for us both; Mamma will do anything I like. And we can live very simply and study together."

The faint smile had faded from Sachs's face. He looked at her gravely, a flush rising. "Dear Fräu-

lein," he said, "you do not understand what it is you ask. Even if it were possible, I should be no fit husband for a young lady like you, beautiful and brilliant with all her life before her; a clumsy, ugly cripple, poor and humble, and a small, small life, so dim, so low; for mine is no great talent; I shall teach, in some small post; one day, perhaps, be a pastor in some small village. Oh no, that is not for you. It would kill you. You will wait, and be good and patient, and the fairy-prince will come all in good time."

Her chin began to tremble. It was only a spar she had found in an ocean of tears. The waves threatened again to engulf her. "You treat me like a child. I am not a child. I know what I say. I have learned about myself in these weeks. It would be beautiful, our life together, because your star would be there; your star would be above it. Do you remember your star, at evening? Oh, say that you will!"

Tears had risen in the young man's eyes. "But Fräulein, dear Fräulein, it cannot be. It is not possible." He looked at her in deep trouble and perplexity. "Beside all else, do you not see, I may not abandon Ludwig. I must find him and stay with him. My beautiful Fräulein, do not think me unworthy or ungrateful. It is more than I can ever say, what you have been to me, what you are to me. But we must part; we must part indeed, dear Fräulein. His life is broken; it is not your fault, but his life is broken and I fear greatly for him. And to no one in the world will he turn as he turns to me."

"But he has turned from you," said Persis in a trembling voice. "He will not see you. Does it mean that you care for Ludwig more than you care for me?"

"No, he has not turned from me. He still seeks me, though it will be unwillingly, because of his wounded pride. To-day he came to my room to find me, and I was not there. It was in the hope—I know it—of a reconciliation."

"Does it mean that you care more for Ludwig then for me?" she repeated, in her dulled and strangely gentle voice. "Tell me. I shall understand anything you say."

"I cannot say what it means, Fräulein. Perhaps that I pity Ludwig more than I do you, and owe him more. My debt of gratitude and loyalty to Ludwig is very deep, for when I was struggling from that base life I told you of, it was his hand that was held out to me, his fierce, cleansing thought that gave me strength. It was then that I first met Ludwig, Fräulein, do you see? Ah! you do not know his generosity, his tenderness, and my heart breaks for him when I think that now you never will. And, Fräulein, I will tell you all; the secret of Ludwig's life, the shadow that rests on him. He is threatened, he is threatened with madness, Fräulein. His illness, a year ago, was on the verge of madness. He knows it and it is his dread. He fights it, but he cannot fight it alone. Ah! he is deserving of pity; which of us has suffered as Ludwig has suffered?"

Persis had become very pale. "How cruel I have been to him," she said.

"No, Fräulein, no, no. The cruellest thing to do to Ludwig would be to show him pity, to show him that you spared him through pity. You have spoken cruel truths to him, but you have not been cruel. It has been the mistake, it has all been the mistake."

But Persis, gazing at him, shook her head. "You do not know. I have been cruel, when he disappointed me. Yet, if he had not disappointed me, what should I have done? Even that I do not know. I do not know what I wanted from Ludwig." And, putting her hands before her face, her tears falling, she told him of the meeting in the woods and of how beautiful Ludwig had been and of her own strange unkindness. "You see, you see," she said, when she had finished. "How I hurt him! He was like a child who has been struck when it was full of trust and love. I shall never forget it;—his eyes, looking up at me, wondering why I struck him!" She sobbed, leaning her head upon her knees.

"I think I guessed what you tell me, Fräulein," Sachs said after a little time had passed. "I saw Ludwig that evening, when he had returned from the woods, and in his grief and anger I read a story not so different from yours. Yes, it is all clear to me. You did not love Ludwig, yet you wished to love him. And he, unless you could have shown him love, had no power to win you."

"You were right," said Persis. She had raised her

head now and dried her tears. "Since I would not marry him, I should have sent him away."

"That would have been best," Sachs assented. "But that, too, would have meant much suffering for Ludwig. For he loved you very dearly."

Again silence fell and then, turning her eyes on his, Persis said: "And what can you do now? How can it be mended now? What will he do without you? I have robbed him of you, too."

"I think it may still be mended, Fräulein," said Sachs, looking gently at her. "It may take time, but Ludwig, I think, will turn to me again. I will go now to his hotel and if he is not there, I will wait for him. And if he drives me away, for he may hear of this meeting of ours, I will follow him and bide my time."

"And you and I must part," said Persis. She was looking at him now, deeply, deeply, her ravaged young face stern in its intentness. She was like a traveller from some far country, to which she must next day return, who, at the closing hour, still lingers in the great gallery and prints upon her mind the design, the colour, the features and the gaze of the masterpiece that she will never see again. And it may well have been that some such thought was also in the young man's mind as he looked back at her. "And we must part, dear Fräulein," he replied.

She looked away for a moment, and down at the pine-needles that still filled her palm. "So that it will be as if we had died. We shall remember each other as if we were dead." She lifted her eyes to his.

"But it does not mean that you do not love me. It will be as if you were dead, but in a heaven somewhere, thinking of me sometimes."

Tears had filled the young man's eyes. They overbrimmed, and a great crystal drop stood on each cheek. And in the stillness of his answering gaze she received an impression, ineffaceable and transfiguring, of a mingled love and anguish which she could never lose again. "Will you think of me like that, my beautiful Fräulein?" he said. "Then my life will be blessed. Yes, you will be my star, never to be forgotten; yes, I shall feel you there, always, above it, like the great star above the Christmas-tree." He had put out his hands to hers and took them and raised them to his lips, looking at her over them. "Do you remember the Christmas-tree we talked of?" he said. "You had seen only one, when you were a very little child. My beautiful Fräulein," he murmured, gazing at her. "Your face is like that now—the *Weihnachts-Baum*—with its lights shining, sacred, child-like—and above it the great star. I shall always see you so."

He held her hands, clasped together in his trembling hands, a moment longer. Then, gently loosing them, he turned his face away and reached out for his crutch and rose. It was growing dusk and it was time to go.

They went in silence down the hillside and came to the river. Tannenkreuz lay before them, already shining here and there from a lighted window.

"Tell me," said Persis, as they went along the path

to the bridge, "tell me, did you like my roses? You said nothing of them in your note. I felt that you thought I had taken a liberty in leaving them."

He did not answer for a moment, and, looking round at him, she found his eyes fixed strangely upon her. Then, smiling, though he was very pale, he said: "No, I did not think that you took a liberty, Fräulein. They were beautiful and it was like your beauty to leave them there for me."

They had reached the bridge now. Would death, Persis wondered, coming suddenly, with no alleviation of weakness, be like this? this darkness, this severance, this loneliness. Yet, was it all suffering? Light encircled the dark moment. And light was in her heart. And across her mind floated the words that had come to her on that day when she had first looked into Herr Sachs's eyes: The peace of God that passeth all understanding. Death too, then, could be beautiful.

They had paused there on the bridge and heard the river flowing swiftly below them. Beyond the bridge their ways parted.

Persis smiled down at him. "Do you think that we shall ever see each other again?" she asked.

He too, smiled. "It may be, dear Fräulein. Who can tell? I shall hope to see you again, and with a husband who is worthy of you, in all ways worthy of you. Or it may be with a great work to do that you will have found."

She continued gently to smile, accepting, it seemed,

all he said to her. "It is then, *auf wiedersehen,* perhaps."

"Perhaps *auf wiedersehen.*"

They crossed the bridge and, for the last time, looked at each other. "I hope that you will find Ludwig," said Persis. "I hope that he will forgive me, and that he will be happy with you again."

It was she, now that the moment had come, who was the braver. Sachs nodded, clasping the hand she held out to him, and his face was oddly contorted in its effort to smile. "*Danke, danke,*" he murmured brokenly.

It was on this faltering murmur that their parting came. They did not again look at each other, Sachs turning into the river-path and Persis entering the street that led to the Pension Müller.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IT was half-past six when she reached the pension, and as she opened the gate she saw Ludwig standing at the sitting-room window looking out at her.

His expression was so strange that, for a moment, she paused and, in the twilight there, felt a sudden, devastating fear, not for herself, but for him; for Conrad, and for Conrad's hopes.

"He hates me," she said to herself, as she closed the gate and ascended the steps; "but I must see him; I must." If it had not been for Conrad she knew that she could not have seen him. Something was demanded of her, she knew, though she could not think it out clearly now, as she stood and waited for the door to open, that would place her side by side with Conrad in his fight for Ludwig and that would keep Conrad near her life, always, as the star was near, even while it parted them for ever. "He must go back to Conrad," the idea floated, "Conrad will be waiting for him, there, in the hotel, sitting at the table waiting for him; and unless I am careful he will not see Ludwig again."

The maid had opened to her, and now, with a curious sinking of the heart yet with steady aim, she turned the handle of the door and entered the room.

The spectral figure confronted her, darkly silhouetted against the window, and an intangible menace, like the infection of some disease, was in the air. That shadow, overhanging Ludwig's life, came to her mind and she thought: "Perhaps he has seen me in the woods and wants to kill me."

She heard herself saying then, in a voice that surprised her, her own deliberate, unmoved voice; "I did not expect to find you here, Ludwig. How dark it is," and crossing before him to the mantelpiece she lighted the two candles that stood upon it so that Ludwig's face, when she turned to him, seemed to flicker and float in the illuminated darkness.

Persis went and stood beside the table.

Almost at once he began to speak, with no vehemence, in a dull, measured voice as though with long rehearsed words. "Well, Fräulein Fennamy, you have, I imagine, greatly enjoyed your afternoon."

He had seen her, then. The blood crept up to her face and she felt it softly tingling behind her ears and beating in her neck. She looked at him and made no reply.

Ludwig, it was evident, misread her gaze. "Yes," he said. "A spy. Say it, as you think it. Your insults will not touch me, Fräulein Fennamy. A spy. So be it. I followed you, you and Lüdenstein, Lüdenstein, my good friend, you, my comrade and disciple. I crept up through the fields when you entered the vineyards and was before you at the spot where, I knew it, you would betray me. The very

spot, I guessed that you would select it, where we talked of our friendship and where I watched above your sleep. It amused me to think of this as I lay in the grass on the other side of the thicket and watched you—in Lüdenstein's arms."

Her head drooped before him and she had turned her eyes away. "I did not know where we were going," she murmured. "I did not know that we were there."

"Your disarray of thought is entirely comprehensible," Wehlitz returned with a malevolent smile.

She could say nothing to him. Tears of shame blurred her downcast eyes.

"I saw it all," Ludwig resumed, and he continued to smile; "and how the lady-mother bore Parsifal in her carriage to the spot with timely succour. Ah, you did not know that your lady-mother was also suspicious? A resourceful little dame, indeed. Yes, you were hemmed in by well-wishers during your not unperilous experiment, Fräulein Fennamy."

Her eyes, amazed, were on him now and he gloated malignantly over their anguish. Her mother! Her mother knew! Her mother had followed and rescued her! Now, seeing it with her mother's eyes, she saw her ugly romance in its full reality. Ludwig's knowledge and Conrad's did not come near to her as this searing, withering intimacy did. To see herself with their eyes was to see herself as piteous or abhorrent; to see herself with her mother's was to stand naked, helpless, an infinitely foolish, an infinitely common-

place creature. The very elements of her personality seemed to dissolve in the crucible of this revelation.

She looked away at last from his intent and jeering eyes and moving from him, sank on the sofa, bending her forehead on her hand. Wehlitz did not follow her. He stood where she had left him.

"Yes, let me look at you," he said. "You afford me, with all my ironic knowledge of women, a new chapter of experience. Here she is, the proud, chaste huntress of the mind, she for whose sake, lest I should offend her susceptibilities, I refrained from pleading or passion, mastering myself, taking her, in my manlike innocence, at her own valuation. Here she is, the comrade of the spirit, the joyous lover of suffering, the bird flying in the blue. Ah! it was easy to deceive me, was it not?—easy to hoodwink the simple philosopher who believed that she was noble and free and strong. She noble! She free! She! the cat! the snake! the greedy child! using its little spiritual gauds as traps for men; the little poems, so sad, so yearning; the delicate disdain of the flesh; the gravity, the sincerity. A greedy child. Yes, and Lüdenstein spoke well, a paper sorceress, an insatiable emptiness, a mirror, cold and dark, reflecting light! Ah! Well may you bow your head! I have no quarrel with Lüdenstein. He has not betrayed me. He is an honest scoundrel! I do not fear such as he! I will find Lüdenstein. We will laugh together over our proud young friend!" Suddenly, the tone of nasal, drag-

ging irony altered. "Did Conrad also kiss you in the wood?" he asked.

A contest, confused and horrible, seemed to pull at the strings of her heart. He broke her. He dissolved her. She saw herself as he saw her. And who could save her from herself but Conrad?

She almost sobbed his name. But to be near Conrad, she must think of Ludwig; she must shield him from self-knowledge such as hers—if he saw himself, how could he go back to Conrad? Yes, she held the clue, and she heard herself murmuring: "You do not understand."

"Ha!" cried Ludwig, with a short laugh, "she will not deign, I perceive, to cast upon me one of her basilisk glances. She resents too much the slight upon her holy love! No kisses there! only tenderness, compassion, forgiveness!"

"Try to understand," said Persis, her face still hidden in her hands. "He is so beautiful. He loves us both so much."

The supplication goaded him to a further fury. "Beautiful! Do I not know it? Have you not told me so? and that he stoops to me! Ah, it is a beauty I could dispense with, that treacherous beauty! It has, I do not doubt, seemed beautiful to you that Conrad, loving me—you assure me, I understand, that he loves me—should behind my back win you from me!"

"It is not true. What you say is not true."

"Not true! Not true! You talk to me of truth!"

His voice rose to a scream. "You! the betrayer! the dealer in lies! Ah! I hear them! the hissing lies of malignancy, the writhing lies of treachery, the greasy lies that whisper of peace and happiness! Your lies! Conrad's lies!—where, behind my back, you mock and betray me!" He approached her and stood above her. "Ah! to the one your kisses! to the other roses, a sweeter gift. I am indeed the least favoured, for to me you gave your soul! Here! Here they are! Yes, I found them. Yes! he does not know what love-tokens you leave for him! Take them to him! Take them to him. They are faded, but they will be none the less sweet to him!"

While he shouted out the broken sentences, panting, he had drawn from his breast and held out to her on his open palm, the knot of roses that she had left that morning on Conrad's table, and she lifted her head at last to gaze at them. They had never reached him; their message, their appeal, all that her written words could not say. And Ludwig had stolen them. Grief, for something irreparable, filled her. From the flowers, she lifted her eyes to Ludwig and looked at him, speechless.

For a moment, his face close to hers, he stared at her. Then, turning from her, he flung the roses down upon the table and took his head in his hands. "The snake!" he muttered. "I saw it—hiding in the grass, the deep, green, dangerous grass. I saw it by the well."

Persis murmured. "I left them there for him, be-

cause I love him and thought that he would come and help me. I was so unhappy."

And Ludwig, holding his head, drew deep, panting breaths and said: "Ah—you love him; and he is strong—and I am paltry; and he is beautiful—and I am the mean thief; and it is through pity that he bears with me. I hear it all—though you do not say it; I hear it all. Yet listen to me," still he spoke with hidden face. "He is not the saint you think him, this Conrad. He is not the pure spirit. Ah, no. I am amused when I think of it. He comes to you all flowers and dawn, and dew; but do you know how first I saw him, your little Parsifal? He was a debauchee; a vulgar debauchee; a libertine; a plebeian libertine; do the words convey to you sufficiently the squalid ugliness? Yes," he lifted his head and fixed his glazed eyes on her; "stare at me with your snake's stare! It is the truth! Ask him if it is not the truth. He will not dare deny it! And who saved him? Who lifted him above the mud! I! I! I!" he beat his clenched fist down upon the table.

Persis's gaze dwelt on him. It was strange at this moment to know that she could still see him with Conrad's eyes, and feel for him an unspeakable pity. "You should not have told me that," she said. "You will feel yourself, I know, later, when you can think more quietly, that you should not. He told me, this afternoon, what you have said. It was to give me comfort. And he told me what you had done for him; how you had helped him; his gratitude to you.

And when I asked him to marry me, he said that he could not, because of his love for you; because of the bond between you; and that he must leave me and follow you, always."

He stood looking at her for a long time after she had finished. She had turned her eyes from him now, and her young profile, lifted to the darkness outside, was stern, concentrated, solemn, like a soldier's who listens to the word of command. The silence had grown long before she looked at him again.

In the flickering candlelight Ludwig's face was fixed on her, and it was calm; almost contemplative. For a long time their eyes met, in silence.

He looked away at last; around the room of their many encounters; down at the table, piled with their useless books, and his eyes falling upon the faded roses, he took them up and seemed to examine them. Then, strangely, he put them to his face.

The gesture smote upon her; pity, and regret, deep, deep regret; remorse for all that she had not been to him, and remembrance of all that there had been of beauty, now destroyed. And she longed to speak to him, to tell him that for him, too, she had love. But the gulfs that had opened between them were too deep for words to cross. It was the end. Holding the faded roses to his face, as if unconsciously, Ludwig walked past her to the door, opened it quietly, and left her.

CHAPTER XXXV

CONRAD and Eleanora sat opposite each other at the table in Ludwig's sitting-room. They had hardly spoken since Conrad, entering, had found her there and had heard from her that, since the morning, Ludwig had not been seen.

The dusk fell and the room grew dark and they still sat on in silence, lifting from time to time their eyes to the clock that ticked, now almost invisible, upon the shelf and, from time to time, looking at each other across the table.

Their fear needed no expression. Eleanora's face was worn with tears and she still wept gently, lifting her handkerchief to her eyes or very softly blowing her nose and murmuring at last, as she crossed herself: "Ave Maria, Mater Dei, Ora pro nobis."

It was at half past seven that they heard Ludwig's step in the passage. Unmistakably it was his step, yet it came with such a strange steadiness and even alertness that, before he entered, the eyes of Conrad and Eleanora again met in a wonder that was not all relief. They had not risen when the door opened and Ludwig appeared before them.

He stood then, in the open door, for a moment, looking at them. The light from the passage fell

upon their upturned faces and from the darkening sky outside the evening light made his face to them just visible.

It seemed that he expected to find them there; for, after this pause, he smiled at them both and then, still smiling, leaving the door ajar, he came forward and stood before them.

"You wait for me?" he said.

"Yes, Ludwig; we have been waiting for some time," said Eleanora. Her voice, in spite of her effort at control, trembled, so strange did she feel his demeanour to be. "We wished to ask you about your plans and when you intend to leave Tannenkreuz. To-morrow morning, you said, I think? And I hoped that you would allow me to pack for you, since you are still so far from strong."

"Ah yes, I see." Ludwig, standing so kindly above them, nodded. "It is good of you to have thought of it, Eleanora." He turned his eyes on Conrad. "And it is good of you, Conrad, to have come. I am very grateful to you both."

"Then——" Eleanora was about to rise, but he laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"Not to-night, Eleanora," he said. "Not to-night. The plans can wait. I am very tired and I must rest. A good sleep is what I am most in need of. To-morrow you shall both see me. Come to-morrow, come early, and I will be ready for you. Then will be the time for plans." Nodding again, still with his faint, fixed smile, he moved towards his bedroom, turning

at the door and pausing there so that there seemed no other choice than to accept his courteous dismissal, and go.

"Good-night, then, Ludwig," Eleanora murmured, rising.

Conrad said nothing. He took up his hat and crutch and prepared to follow her.

"Sleep well, Ludwig," she said. "We will come early, and shall hope to find you entirely restored."

"I thank you," Ludwig returned, his eyes resting on them with a sweetness long indeed alien to him. "And good-night to you, my friends."

When they were outside in the corridor, the door closed behind them, Conrad paused.

"Signorina," he said.

Eleanora also paused; "Yes," she said. They spoke in lowered voices.

"He is not well," said Conrad. "Ludwig is not well."

"Ah, he is very far from well!" Eleanora assented with nervous impatience. "Very far indeed from well! Do we not know it?"

"What I mean," said Conrad, his eyes falling to the ground, "is that I do not feel that I can leave him. I feel that it would be best if I were to return and sit quietly there and wait until I hear that he is asleep. He will be quite unaware of my presence."

He glanced up at her. "That will be best; do you not think so?"

Eleanora nodded vehemently, compressing her lips.

"Yes, yes, yes," she uttered, with effort. "It was my thought, also. I, also, did not wish to leave him."

"You will leave him with me? You feel it best that I should wait alone, do you not?"

"Yes. Best. He is safe with you." Her handkerchief was at her eyes and, blindly, she held out a hand to him. Conrad clasped it and so they parted.

He entered the little salon again. The door of Ludwig's bedroom was outlined in light. Already he had lit his candles.

With infinite precaution Conrad made his way to the table, leaning on it for a moment, and, as he did so, he noticed that the inkstand was not in its place. It had been there a moment earlier. Ludwig had returned to get it as soon as they were gone. He was writing in his room.

Manœuvering his crutch with the utmost care, the young man continued his progress across the room. He reached Ludwig's door and laid his ear upon the crack.

He could hear now, faintly, but clearly, the sounds within. There was the rustle of paper being turned, the swift scratching of a pen, a chair that creaked slightly. After that, the sound of folding paper.

Then came a silence. "Will he begin to undress now?" Conrad thought. Ludwig put back the chair and rose. He crossed the room and Conrad laid his hand on the door-knob. No, he had not gone to the dressing-table. He was pouring water from the

carafe on the wash-stand; but the sound of an opening drawer was heard, of the little drawer in the wash-stand where he kept some medicines that Conrad knew of. Conrad turned the handle. The door was locked.

The sounds inside ceased with a terrible suddenness.

Conrad now leaned heavily against the door. The strength of his body, driven from the feeble lower limbs, was concentrated in his shoulders; and he gave it all. With clenched teeth, twisted brows, veins that started on his forehead and throat, he pressed against the door; the lock cracked, yielded, the door burst open and he went in.

Ludwig was standing there before him. His hat was still, very oddly, upon his head. He held a small white paper in his hand and his eyes were fixed, in a stern yet ghastly astonishment, upon the door. Conrad closed it, recovering the crutch that slipped from under his shoulder, and going up to his friend, he laid his hand upon the paper; and, as Ludwig's fingers closed convulsively upon it, the young man put an arm around him. "No—no—no, Ludwig," he said. "It is not the time for that."

His illumined eyes were on his friend. He gazed at him without reproach. "It is not the time for that, Ludwig," he repeated.

Wehlitz put forth his whole strength in resistance against him. "You do not understand," he said, speaking in the same quiet tones with which he had

greeted them in the sitting-room. "I have written to you. I have said all that there is to say."

"No, no, Ludwig," Conrad repeated. "That is a mistake."

They still stood locked in their watchful grip.

"It is not a mistake," Wehlitz returned. "I have betrayed you. I am a false, a cowardly friend. She will tell you of it. I am a man who has no right to live. Only death can redeem my baseness."

"That is all beside the mark, Ludwig," said Conrad. "You misconceive our relation. It would be intolerable if a man like you should commit suicide through a misconception."

A convulsive trembling shook Wehlitz. "I understand all you would say. She has made it clear. You have inspired her; she, too, I saw it well, mastered her loathing of me to save me. We all live in your strength. That, too, she told me; but it was the other day, before she, too, had grown pitiful. She has told me all the good you said of me to her—and believed of me; while I spat my venom at you! Oh, Conrad! Conrad!" he broke suddenly into dreadful sobs. "Let me die! All is at an end. The world will not listen to me and I am a weak and foolish man; and the vultures, Conrad, the vultures, pick at my brain. Let me go, while it is I myself who can choose to go."

He sank on a chair and the little cripple knelt beside him, sustaining him. Holding him in his arms, his face fixed in its patient watchfulness, he said;

"You are not yourself, Ludwig. That is what I mean. You have not been yourself for many days."

"I understand you! I understand you!" Wehlitz sobbed. "It is pity, pity, pity for the real cripple; pity for the weak and self-deluded man. Am I not a laughing-stock in my own eyes that I am still here to receive it? If you knew true pity, you would let me go."

"And I am pitiless, Ludwig; I am pitiless," said Conrad, looking into his face. "It is easier for you to go, but it is not your real self that takes the easier way. It would be absurd, do you see, for you to go like this, destroying your life because you have been warped and distraught by a love affair."

"My life!" Wehlitz cried, "and what of yours? She loves you, and it is I who stand between you! If I die you will marry her."

"Oh, no, Ludwig," said the young man quietly. "I shall not marry her. I love her far too much to yield to my own heart and to hers. What would her life be with me? What pride or joy could there be for her in a husband who was merely her husband? If I entered the life which is naturally hers, I should have no place in it. And do you see her taking her place in mine? Do you see her becoming the provincial *Frau Professorin* or *Frau Pastorin?* I do not. No, Ludwig, I could not say that I have renounced the idea of marriage; it has not entered my mind."

An atmosphere of peaceful veracity emanated from the young man. Wehlitz spoke presently, in a low

voice, and his eyes, still, did not meet his friend's. "She has destroyed it all," he said, "all my faith, in my work, in myself. She despises me, and I see myself with her eyes. The future? What future is there for me? I see the doom to which I go and there are no battles to be won as I march towards it."

"You think it is destroyed because you are ill," said Conrad. "The truth is that she will always remember you as a strange, flashing brightness that crossed her life. And even if it were true that she despised you, would that be of great consequence?" He slightly smiled. "My opinion is of little value, but it is worth more than hers; and I am satisfied that the world will one day listen to you and that you cannot be spared. The old story will repeat itself. The world will reject too much, and accept too much, and exalt and vilify you, and at the end be enriched by another vein of pure ore in all its dross and granite. No, Ludwig," and now he smiled his own comedian's smile of melancholy jocularity, "it is not for you to fling out of life like the gloomy hero of a romantic novel. You must live by your own doctrine and laugh at yourself. Such impulses are to be laughed down. And as for me, and for our friendship, we understand each other too well, we have shared life too deeply, to be bound by conventionalities. If you owe me some reparation, you will pay the debt by ignoring it. You must live as though it had not been. You must forget it. That is what I do."

Wehlitz had listened to him, his eyes on his at last, his lips folded in a profound sadness. "But, Conrad, wait," he said. He laid his hand upon his arm. "Wait, Conrad. You do not yet know all. Look; look at this, my friend." His face again convulsed with the nervous trembling, he drew the roses from his breast and held them out, lifting eyes of heavy shame upon the young man. "I stole them from you," he said. "She had left them for you, and I stole them. Oh, my friend, you give your life to me—and I take all, all from you—even this love-token from the woman you love, that beautiful, baleful woman, young basilisk and death-dealer that she is! She loves you, and this was her message to you."

"Yes, yes, yes," Conrad nodded, blinking rapidly and with a grimace of involuntary pain. "It was bad, Ludwig, very bad. And very foolish too. The act of the gloomy, romantic lover, was it not? Have we not had enough of him? Is he not dead and buried? I forgive him, with all my heart, and so let the matter end."

"And what will you do with them now?" Wehlitz asked, still holding out the roses and looking at his friend with great intentness.

And Conrad, smiling, after a moment of hesitation, said: "Since they were meant for me, I will keep them." He took out his pocket-book and laid the roses within it. "I will keep them in memory of Fräulein Fennamy and of Tannenkreuz."

CHAPTER XXXVI

PERSIS went upstairs to her mother's room. A further step remained to be taken, a step whether of expiation, immolation or reconstruction, she could not have said. Her being, bruised, exalted and exhausted, craved for sleep and darkness; but as the sense of compulsion had moved her to Ludwig, so now she knew that she could not sleep until she had stood before her mother and heard what she had to say to her. Unimaginable scene, more fantastic than the scene just passed through in the little sitting-room;—for she and Ludwig belonged to the realm of strange happenings, and only by her own act of madness had her mother been brought into it.

The faint odour of violet-powder greeted her as she entered, and the crisp scent of tonged hair. Between two candles, Mrs. Fennamy sat at her dressing-table, and under her hand stood the little spirit-lamp with the tongs laid above its range of soft blue flame. She was waving her hair, a craft she practised with great skill, and as Persis entered she lifted the tongs and ran them, with dexterous turns and clippings, through the thick, faded locks, loosely caught up about her head. Then, meeting her daughter's eyes in the

mirror, she set the tongs again in their place and took up a comb.

"You 've had a long walk, have n't you?" she said. "I expect you 're pretty tired."

Persis sat down on the chair against the wall as she had sat after the first walk with Ludwig, many weeks ago. She felt, suddenly, so weak that she knew she could not meet what was required of her if she remained standing. She had not known what to expect; but she had not expected this.

Her mother's eyes no longer met hers. She was engaged with the comb, lightly fluffing the little fringe that crossed her infantile forehead.

"Yes; I am very tired," said Persis, after a short time had passed. "It was a long walk. And you came up to the woods, too, Ludwig told me; with Herr Sachs."

The compulsion was upon her to utter the words. She must make it easier for her mother, if she shrank from laying the torch to the heaped up faggots. And, indeed, a slight change was perceptible in the placid mirrored features. "Oh," said Mrs. Fennamy, "Herr Wehlitz saw us, did he?" and after a pause she went on: "He 's been here, then? Herr Sachs did n't find him? Herr Sachs was very anxious about him, so I drove him up."

"You started soon after Graf von Lüdenstein and I did?"

"Yes; I thought I 'd like a little drive."

"And you went and got Herr Sachs?" Persis spoke in a low voice.

"Yes," Mrs. Fennamy repeated, after another pause. "I went and got him. I like Herr Sachs, and I thought he'd enjoy the drive, perhaps."

And now, in the mirror, mother and daughter's eyes met in a curious interchange, not long, and, seemingly, not deep. That there was so little to read in Mrs. Fennamy's gaze was, perhaps, the offering she made to her child's need. There was nothing for Persis to face; no expiation; no faggots of any sort. She was to walk, as always, unscathed by overt interference; and if the mother had been revealed as vigilant and the daughter as inadequate, no claim was to be based on the revelation, and no pledges exacted. It was more than a fine and silken pride that shrank from the crudity of emotional avowals and forgiveness; in the crystal flawlessness of her daughter's independence lay, after all, the whole object of Mrs. Fennamy's existence, and the deepest satisfaction of her affection. It was that affection which was expressed rather than any other consciousness when her eyes dropped and a slight colour crept into her cheek. She took up the curling-tongs again.

"No; Herr Sachs didn't find him," Persis, speaking still in her low, unstressed voice, now went on. "He found me instead. He and I had a long talk. And Ludwig was waiting for me when I got back. He is just gone. We shall never see each other again."

"I thought you 'd parted yesterday," Mrs. Fennamy observed, turning the tongs in another tress of hair.

"I thought so too. He felt that he must see me again, I think, to tell me how much he hated me."

She leaned forward now on her knees, her face in her hands, but she was not weeping, and in an unchanged voice, she said: "Is it not terrible when two people have cared so much for each other—to have come to that?"

"It often does, I expect, if they are not the sort of people who are meant to care for each other," said Mrs. Fennamy. "And you don't hate him, I suppose."

"No, I don't hate him. I shall always remember everything that was beautiful in him, while he will always remember everything that was ugly in me."

"That would be because he was in love with you, and you were n't with him," said Mrs. Fennamy. "It would hurt him too much to remember the beautiful things."

Again there was a little silence, broken only by the soft, dulled click of the tongs. Then Persis rose.

"When shall we go, mamma? Do you think that we could get off by to-morrow morning?"

"Why, of course, we can," said Mrs. Fennamy. "Everything is packed. There 's only the bill to pay."

Persis moved towards the door. "I shall go to bed now, mamma. I am so tired."

"That 's the best thing you can do. I 'll bring you some hot milk when you 're in bed."

With her hand on the door, Persis paused for another moment, as if she felt that there was still something to be said; then, feeling that there was nothing she could find to say, she smiled a faint acquiescence, and went out.

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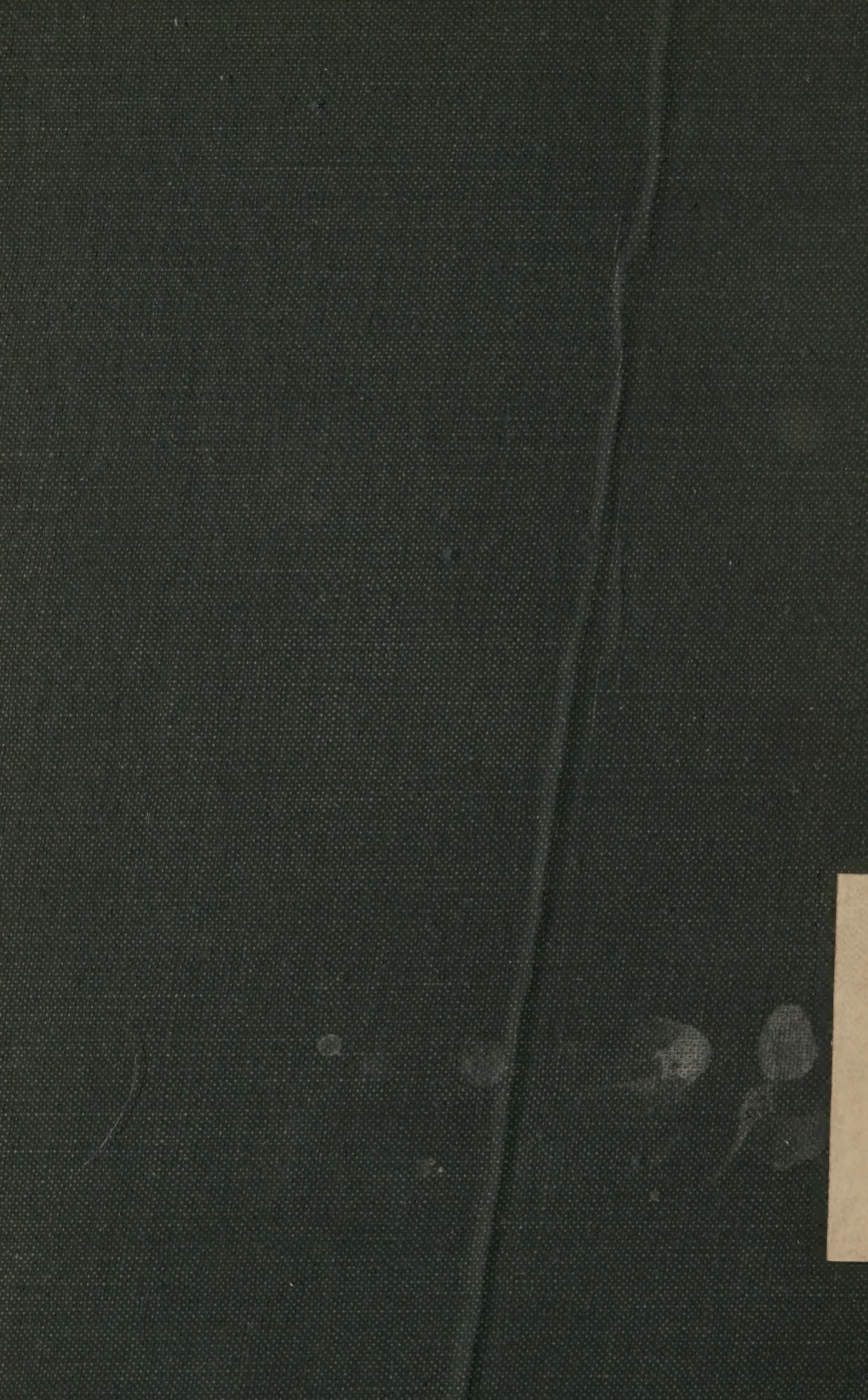
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